

**THE GOSPELS
AND THE CRITIC**

THE GOSPELS AND THE CRITIC

BY

A. W. F. BLUNT, D.D.

Bishop of Bradford

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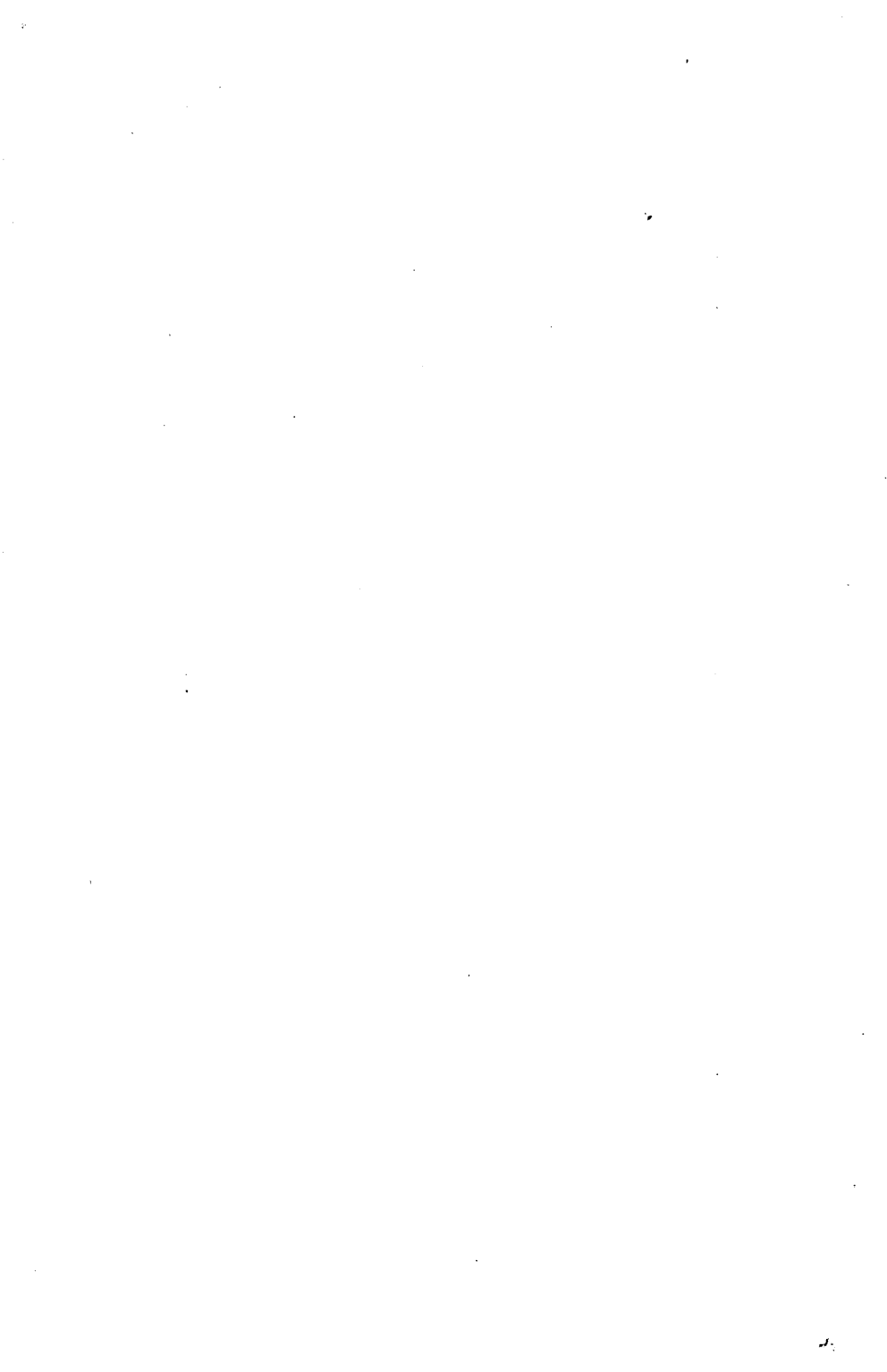
PREFACE

AT the Bournemouth Church Congress in 1935, I read a paper on 'Christ in the Gospels', which I have now enlarged into the present book. It is intended for those who, without being specialist students of the Bible, are yet interested enough in the study to wish to know what is the present position in Gospel criticism. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Vincent Taylor and Dr. F. L. Cross for some helpful suggestions in the course of its composition.

A. B.

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I

IN DEFENCE OF CRITICISM

THIS book is intended for those Christians, whether clergy or laity, who are not specialists in Biblical study. Their degrees of ignorance of the subject vary very greatly. But the habit of open discussion is part of the price of civilization; and in our own time the activities of the Press are so ubiquitous that there can be very few, even of 'simple Christians', who are not in some way or another brought up at times against the reverberations of the critical movement. They may be uninterested in or impatient with it, it may cause them to worry or doubt; but they cannot pass through life as if there were no such thing or as if it did not seriously matter to anybody.

The dislike for novelty is a very persistent prejudice; and, in questions where religion is concerned, that which is mere conservatism loves to pose as orthodoxy. There is therefore no cause for surprise in the fact that nowadays, after over a hundred years of Biblical study in its modern form, there are still many who distrust the higher criticism of the Bible, and consider the higher critic to be either an enemy of the Faith or at least an insidiously dangerous species of Modernist. In certain circles it is still possible to win a cheap reputation for controversial smartness by speaking with a sneer of 'the so-called higher critics', a phrase which is as intelligent as it would be to speak of a 'so-called' pharmaceutical chemist or a 'so-called' civil engineer.

Let us therefore at the outset be clear as to the meaning

of the terms which we use. 'Criticism' in relation to the Bible means nothing else but the application of scientific study to the books, in the same way as it may be applied to any other piece of literature. The 'lower criticism' concerns itself with the text. The 'higher criticism' studies such questions as the authorship, sources, date, and character of the books. *A priori* suspicion of such study is mere ignorant obscurantism. The conclusions reached and the theories suggested are liable to and in fact demand exhaustive examination. Scholars can make mistakes; they have to revise or renounce many an hypothesis. But that the Biblical books should be exempt from an investigation designed to appraise their claim to authenticity or to authority (two very different things) is a demand which no intelligent lover of truth will make or allow.

The Process of Criticism

Higher criticism of the Bible first set itself to inquire into the authorship and date of the books. For instance, was the Pentateuch, as the titles in the A.V. claimed, a set of five books by Moses or not? Were the chapters 40-66 of the Book of Isaiah written by that prophet in the late eighth or early seventh century B.C., or were they by writers of the exilic or post-exilic period? Was the Book of Daniel exilic or later? Was the traditional ascription of the Fourth Gospel to John the Son of Zebedee correct, or must some other account be given of its production? Was the First Gospel written by S. Matthew, and who was the John who wrote the Book of Revelation?

It must be realized that such questions as these did not cast any reflection on the authority or the inspiration of

the books themselves, but only on their authenticity. The titles of the books are not part of the books. It was not the writer of the Pentateuch who called its five books the Books of Moses, nor was it Isaiah who called the sixty-six chapters of his book the Book of Isaiah. Ancient books had no titles; these were supplied by later scholars and were themselves a first essay of higher criticism. It is true that the first verse of Isaiah claims Isaianic authorship; but can it be established that this claim covers the whole of the chapters that follow? Did Isaiah collect the chapters himself, or was the roll of 'Isaiah' an agglomeration of separate prophecies, which Jewish scholars united to form one volume, so that the ascription of large parts of it was the work not of Isaiah but of Jewish criticism? The Book of Deuteronomy contains a great many speeches attributed to Moses; but was this attribution to be taken literally, or was it only a literary convention whereby that was ascribed to Moses which was considered a proper derivative of his teaching? The traditional ascriptions of the Gospels were due to the higher critics of the early Church. In John 21²⁴ the Gospel is said to be the work of 'the beloved disciple'; but it is not stated who gives this attestation nor is the name of the beloved disciple recorded. The presumption of infallible inspiration cannot be legitimately applied to the claims to authorship made for at least most of the books, for most of them make no such claims on their own behalf.

But criticism could not stop at this point. It was natural that from the subject of authenticity it should go on to that of authority. It could not fail to be remarked that, for instance, the books of the Pentateuch were by no

means homogeneous, that the books of Joshua and Judges were not historically reconcilable with one another, that Chronicles in several respects gave a different account of Hebrew history from that to be found in Kings, that there were plain divergences in the four Gospels, or that the Book of Acts could not easily be made to tally at all points with S. Paul's Epistles. How could these differences be explained? And if a choice had to be made between them, what canons of historical science might be applied to direct the selection?

This was purely a question of historical scholarship. It could only be answered by bringing into consideration all the relevant data, whether internal or external. No religious or philosophical presuppositions had the right to any say in the matter. And, in relation to the Old Testament, scholarship did on the whole keep itself free from such clouding of the issues. No doubt critical hypotheses have had to be continually revised, as fresh data were discovered, or fresh light on old data was brought to bear. But it is worth while to emphasize that the process of Old Testament criticism has usually been one of scholarly self-correction. Radical critics and conservative critics have equally been critics; they have applied scientific methods, and their dispute has been not as to the methods but as to the relative importance of the several data used in applying these methods. Suggestions, answers, and rejoinders have all been on the plane of science; and out of the process of argument it has emerged that the alternatives before us are those of accepting either an evolutionary or a static view of Old Testament history and religion. The issue may be thus explained:

The Static View of the Old Testament

According to the 'static' view, which is the traditional view of Biblical conservatism, the Pentateuch as it stands is Mosaic. Moses therefore gave the Hebrew tribes a complete ceremonial and social and religious code, anticipatory of the conditions of a settled community. Thus, there was always an Aaronic High-priesthood, with a subordinate priesthood monopolized by the tribe of Levi. From Mosaic times there was a complete cultus suitable to a pure Jahvism, thought out to the smallest detail of tassels and breeches; there was an elaborate Tabernacle, which was the centre of worship, wherever it was, whether at Shiloh or Bethel or Jerusalem, and which from Solomon's time was incorporated in the Temple; there was a complete system of daily, weekly, and annual sacrifice.

If so, then the history of the Hebrews in Canaan was one of frequent and deliberate apostasies; the people forsook the centralized worship in order to sacrifice at high places to idolatrous baalim and ashtaroth; and the golden bulls of Jeroboam I were the cause of a continuous apostasy of the northern kingdom. But these were overt rebellions; and whenever reforms came, the complete system only needed reviving, with the Tabernacle or Temple as the only place of sacrifice, the High Priest and Levites as the only ministers of worship, and the three annual visits to Jerusalem of every true worshipper.

The criticisms which Biblical science can make on this picture are obvious. To begin with, it is a deadening picture of a process that starts with a frozen perfection, which thaws at times only to freeze again. It is not a

natural picture of religious growth. Again, it makes the canonical prophets excrescences on, or at least subordinate to, the story of the process. The patriarchal and wilderness period is treated as more important than the prophetic period. The prophets are the heralds of reversion, not of advance. Moreover, when we set the Pentateuch side by side with the historical books, the history becomes purely unintelligible. Thus, even if we raise no objection, on the score of probability, to the possession of an elaborate Tabernacle by nomad tribes wandering in the desert, we cannot so easily get over the fact that no High Priest seems ever to be heard of or to hold a position of any importance till the time of Haggai; that the prophetic hatred of any form of sacrifice is almost unqualified, and in Amos 5²⁵, Jeremiah 7²² it is definitely denied that a sacrificial system had been ordained by Jahveh in the wilderness period; and that the evidence for the use of high places and of a ritual suitable to them is wholly inconsistent with the theory that the idea of a centralized worship dated from Moses. We find everybody using them (cf. Judges 17³, 18³⁰; 1 Sam. 9¹¹⁻¹⁴, 19, 10⁸, 19¹⁶; 1 Kings 14^{23, 24}) and others than Levites offering sacrifices. No king interferes with them till Hezekiah (2 Kings 18⁴), nor really abolishes them till Josiah. No prophet denounces them till Hosea (4¹²⁻¹⁴). Worship at the high places, so far from being an apostasy, was orthodoxy, at least until Hezekiah's time. No hint that it is wrong is found in the historical books except in the recurrent formula of the writer of the Books of Kings. The static picture of tradition is only obtained by taking the Pentateuch as history, and 'rigging' the historic and propheti-

cal books to fit it; and the resultant picture is dull and lifeless.

The Evolutionary View of the Old Testament

Let us now, by contrast, set out the story as reconstructed for us by that school of Old Testament criticism in which the greatest name is that of Wellhausen; it is the picture which in its main lines, whatever uncertainty there may be as to details, is accepted by all reputable scholars as a reasonable synthesis of the available data. According to it, the Mosaic cultus was simple and primitive. Its main apparatus consisted of the Tent of Meeting, the Ark, the Urim and Thummim, and an improvised Altar; there was no specific law of Jahvistic worship and nothing but a primitive sacrificial practice. But, when they entered Canaan, the Hebrews adopted the Canaanite method of ritual and sacrifice and used the Canaanite high places. At every local sanctuary sacrificial worship was practised; there was no centralized system; and though Solomon made the Temple at Jerusalem the royal chapel, the worship at the high places still continued in general use, and nobody thought it wrong. Later, the monarchy introduced the worship of foreign gods; and the protest of Elijah and Elisha was directed against this with some success. But the use of the high places still continued until, after the prophets of the eighth century had preached a more elevated idea of Jahveh's character, the first attempt to purge the national worship was made by Hezekiah. This failed, and in the seventh century a full code of Jahvistic worship was compiled in the spirit of eighth-century prophecy, with all sacrificial worship centred at

Jerusalem. This, the Deuteronomic Code, was the inspiration of Josiah's reform. But the early death of that king and the closely following exile gave this law no chance of being established. During the Exile, however, under the influence of Ezekiel and others, and after the Return, the elaboration of Jahvistic cultus continued, through the antiquarian efforts of priests and the zeal of the prophetic party, until the Priestly Code was compiled, mainly by the efforts of the Babylonian Jews, and this code, brought to Judea by Ezra, was incorporated with the previously existing documents to form the completed Pentateuch.

Here we have a coherent story. It rests mainly on the analysis of the Pentateuchal documents into J (the Jahvistic document), E (the Elohist document),¹ H (the Law of Holiness, Lev. 17-26, which is perhaps contemporary with or slightly older than Ezekiel), D (the Deuteronomic Code), and P (the Priestly Code). This analysis by no means depends merely on the variety of names given to God, but is based also on real affinities and real divergences of tone and outlook, of style and vocabulary, between different strata of the literature. But its chief cogency arises from the fact that it offers an adequate correspondence with the phenomena of the historical and prophetic books and a reasonable interpretation of the characteristics of the Pentateuch itself.

Stated as we have put it, the story may seem, if anything, to have the defect of being too neat and tidy. It must be realized that it has in fact a number of rough edges, and on certain points there is still disagreement

¹ These receive their names from the fact that in them the usual name for God is respectively Jahveh and Elohim.

among leading scholars. Thus, for instance, the date and place of origin of the earliest form of the Deuteronomic Code is a matter of dispute; the materials of the Deuteronomic and Priestly Codes may in some cases be of much higher antiquity than the completed codes which incorporated them; the exact relation of E to D, or of H to Ezekiel, is hard to determine; the legal codes may at various times have been subject to revision and modification. But there is no serious challenge to the essential points in the reconstruction.

In the first place, the view that the Pentateuch is a unity is rejected as untenable. It is a composite product, and its parts date from various centuries. The relative dating of the documents is generally accepted. Nobody calls in question the isolated position and late date of P; and though some scholars would place the date of D, or at least of D in an early form, before the seventh century, while some would place it after the Exile, the almost universal view is that in its present form it is pre-exilic, that it is inspired by the prophecy of the eighth century and is an attempt to express in cultus the moral and spiritual ideas of those prophets, and that it was the textbook of Josiah's reformation.

This being so, it follows that the purification of Jahvistic theology is late, and was the work of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, and that the systematization of a distinctive Jahvistic cultus is later still, following on the higher ideas about God which those prophets had proclaimed. The history of Hebrew religion is therefore the history of a religious evolution; this is the chief religious conclusion from the work of scholarship, and it abolishes

the 'static' view which had been that of conventional conservatism.

Criticism and Archaeology

Recent archaeological discoveries have made no essential inroad upon the critical position, in spite of the absurdly exaggerated claims that have sometimes in this regard been made for them. So far as they go, the most that they prove is the possibility that there may have been written documents of Moses' time, from which some of the Pentateuchal material may be derived: and that the historical tradition embodied in certain parts of the Pentateuchal narrative is better than criticism used to think, or indeed had any right to think, before these discoveries were made.¹ Archaeology therefore has added fresh data

¹ In his recent book on *Abraham* (1936), Sir Leonard Woolley accepts the critical analysis of the Pentateuch, but argues for the substantial accuracy of the historical tradition of the patriarchal period. 'There was no period in Hebrew history', he says, 'for which contemporary written authority of one kind or another could not possibly have existed. . . . But to suppose that the story of Abraham in the form in which we have it in the Old Testament could have been written in his own time or for many centuries after his own time is to betray a complete ignorance of what men anciently wrote. . . . As regards the purely narrative portion of the Biblical story of Abraham, any written sources from which it is drawn must themselves be of relatively late date and be ultimately based on an oral tradition already very ancient; only a very few points, and those of minor interest, could possibly depend on documents contemporary with the events. . . . The oral tradition in itself is a very much more reliable authority than certain critics have allowed. . . . Generally there was in the story as originally told a fair substratum of literal truth . . . and the patently poetical embellishments of later days do not mean that there is no kernel of fact at all.' This shows just how archaeology can supplement, modify, or support, the theories of criticism. It is in refreshing contrast to the books which treat archaeology and criticism as if they were a pair of dogs quarrelling over a bone.

for criticism to take into account, and has modified the judgement that used to be passed on the historical authority of the tradition.¹ But it has done nothing whatever to impair at any vital point the solid coherence of the critical reconstruction or to disprove the composite character of the Pentateuchal literature. It is unfortunate that some of those whose interests lie in archaeological discovery should surrender to the temptation of setting up an antagonism between archaeology and criticism and should over-press the results of their special science as they do. The external evidence revealed by the spade and the internal evidence of the literature itself compose the data upon which scholars have to work; and it is poor scholarship which would seek to leave either out of the reckoning.

Compared with this fundamental reconstruction of the religious history, critical dealings with the rest of the Old Testament are of subsidiary importance. It has become obvious that the prophetic oracles of the pre-exilic and exilic periods existed in largely fragmentary form, and that the work of collecting them and apportioning them (most of them being anonymous) to the various prophets of the canonical list was the work of Jewish scholarship

Woolley fully recognizes that 'Higher Criticism is a specialized science lying wholly outside the province of archaeology; the archaeologist can only take over the findings of the critics. Fortunately, here there is no need to follow implicitly the opinions of any one scholar, for in spite of differences of view on points of detail the critics are so completely in agreement on the main issues that the layman can accept their broad results with confidence.'

¹ A good synopsis of archaeological discovery and a reasonable estimate of its bearings on Old Testament history is provided in Caiger's *Bible and Spade*.

after the Exile; it cannot therefore be regarded as more infallible than any other work of higher criticism. The Psalter has been divided into five different books, and the problem of its authorship has been frankly given up. Nobody now would dream of claiming Davidic authorship for the Book of Psalms. It is recognized that the poems were the hymn-book of the second Temple, with many later supplements, and that no clues to the authorship of such a collection can be recovered. The main body of apocalyptic literature lies outside the Canon; but within it we have such sections as Joel, the later part of Zechariah, Isaiah 24-7, and Daniel, about which the view has been generally accepted that they date from the period of apocalyptic speculation which began perhaps about 200 B.C. and was at its height in the Maccabean era. Some still attempt to argue for the exilic date of Daniel, but while their arguments render it possible that some of the tradition in that book is pre-Maccabean, the book itself as it stands cannot be assigned to an earlier date. Its historical characteristics and its historical errors alike render such a theory untenable.¹

In all this process of critical discussion, the argument, as we said, has been kept by both sides mainly in the tone of scientific scholarship. It is true that some have tried to excite prejudice by speaking of 'destructive criticism', though the whole tendency of Wellhausen's school has been, while destroying a conventional picture of the process of history to construct a new picture which should more faithfully incorporate all the data. But such appeals to prejudice have as a rule been the rare production of

¹ The latest book on this subject is Rowley's *Darius the Mede*.

those who, in the realm of scholarship, can only be considered camp-followers.

New Testament Criticism

But it has to be confessed that in regard to the New Testament the work of scholarship has not been so free from preconceptions on the part of those engaged in it. Here the power of presupposition has strongly influenced the arguments of scholars, and the conclusions of critics have been biased by the moral and spiritual presumptions with which they started, e.g. as to the reality of the supernatural and its relation to the natural, or as to the possibility of miracles. It is not too much to say that many critics seem to have begun with a complete aversion from any treatment of the New Testament which should make the Christian interpretation in any way tenable. I have little doubt that Strauss's *Life of Jesus* had a very adulterating effect on New Testament scholarship.

This criticism of the Gospels has often been guided by the view that, miracles being impossible, you must allow time for the growth of fictitious narratives of miraculous events, and therefore the Gospels must be late; or that, as the Gospels picture a person who makes supernatural claims, or for whom such claims are made, and as such claims cannot possibly be justified, one must allow time for the transmutation of a mere moral teacher or social reformer into a figure of supernatural status. One eccentric school was even responsible for maintaining that Jesus was only a mythical figure. In both these cases, as we can see, the critical view would not be a work of pure scholarship, but would be affected by a *parti pris* on other

grounds than the scientific evaluation of the existing data. Here then it is unfortunately possible to speak of 'destructive' critics without feeling that one is using a question-begging epithet; and this fact has undoubtedly caused New Testament criticism in general to be less scientific and more irresponsible in its dealing with the data than has been the case with Old Testament criticism.

It may be conceded that the business of analysing the sources, authorship, and relations of the New Testament books has been well and scientifically done. In this sphere, which is mainly independent of extraneous prejudice, much good work has been accomplished. Various far-fetched hypotheses have been put forward, e.g. that the Gospels were historically valueless productions of the second century, that the early Church was riddled by an antagonism between Peter and Paul (the Tübingen theory), that the Acts was a fabricated apologetic work of a very late date, and so on. But all these have by now been condemned at the bar of scholarship itself. It is now seen that the theory of a Petrine versus a Pauline Christianity will not hold good and that the Pauline Epistles fall congruously into place in the authoritative tradition of the Apostolic Church. Investigation of the Synoptic problem has reached some results, which now stand beyond question in the court of criticism, and which make it certain that the evangelic tradition goes back to the apostolic age of the Church. In relation to Acts, though Harnack's *volte-face*, by which, from giving to the book a date no earlier than A.D. 100, he reacted to a belief that it was written before S. Paul's execution, has found few followers, and though the problem of the exact historicity

of Acts 1-15 is still a problem, yet it may be said that few could now be found to dispute the Lukan authorship of Acts or to question the excellence of its historical quality.

German and English Scholarship

But if the work of analysis has been well done, that of reconstruction has been by no means so satisfactory, because there the power of prejudice has been much more directly at work. One may say, broadly, that the issue has been and to some extent is still being fought out between the German and the English schools. German scholarship has been marked by immense learning, astonishing industry, and a superabundant ingenuity. Almost no hypothesis was too wild for some section of the German school to support with a wealth of learned argument. But it often gave one the impression of an entire irresponsibility with regard to the Christian Faith, and an inability to see the whole range of facts which have to be accounted for; and this is ultimately unscholarly. One can always learn from the German critics, but one must beware of swallowing their theories without rigorous examination. They had the disadvantage of sitting loose to all Christian tradition; and thus their theories seemed to explain everything except the existence of the Christian religion and of the Christian Church, which after all are solid facts which no theory can be excused from leaving out of the reckoning.¹

On the other hand, the English school of criticism, while neither so learned nor so ingenious as the German, is

¹ The great age of German Biblical scholarship seems to have ended with the War. Since then, German Protestant theology has been little interested in Biblical studies. Even the Form-critics appear to have aroused comparatively little interest in Germany.

characterized by scholarly caution and sanity. Being, as most of its members are, more strongly imbued with the tradition of Christian orthodoxy, they insist in particular that the supernatural explanation cannot be ruled out *a priori* as impossible; that the data of the living Church must be reckoned, inasmuch as the Church gave us the New Testament; and that it is unhistorical not to insist on preserving a real line of connexion between the Jesus of the Gospels and the Christ of the Church.¹ English scholarship is therefore, by contrast with the German, marked by a strong sense of responsibility to the traditional interpretation of the evangelic record; and this not merely in deference to orthodox prejudice, but also from the really scholarly conviction that this tradition is itself part of the data which have to be brought into consideration, and that we must not dissect the documents as if they were dead specimens of literature, but must remember that they are the products of a living society and have only been preserved to us at all because there was a living society which both guaranteed and safeguarded them.

The purpose of this book is to provide a short account of the present position of Gospel criticism; and in doing so illustrations will be given of the general statements which have been made above. But this chapter has been devoted to the purposes of general introduction for two main reasons: firstly, because there has been of late a marked tendency to suggest that in consequence of recent archaeological discoveries, the whole critical method with

¹ *The Riddle of the New Testament*, by Hoskyns and Davey, is an admirable treatment of the bearing of criticism on this fundamental problem.

regard to the Old Testament has been exposed as false, and a 'fundamentalist' attack on criticism is once more speaking confidently and even arrogantly. In regard to this, it has been pointed out that the archaeological discoveries, interesting and important as some of them are, only touch the side-issues of the critical theory; the main position is unshaken. The Pentateuch may contain better historical traditions than was once supposed. But that it is composed of different strata of narrative and legislation, which cannot be contemporaneous with one another, that it represents a process of ritual and ceremonial development covering several hundred years, and that a theory of religious evolution is alone consonant with the phenomena of the historical and prophetic books, is a conclusion which no archaeological discovery has ever assailed, still less undermined.

The second reason for our general introduction is to make plain to the reader that, while we must not be blind to the weaknesses which have shown themselves in the critical treatment of the Bible, there is no reason to doubt that in general the methods which have been applied are not mere subjective fancies but a scientific exercise of scholarship; judged by the test of scholarly consensus, they have been used in such a way as to throw a flood of light upon the books which compose the sacred volume.

NOTE

In dealing with Old Testament criticism, we have paid no attention to the argument which has sometimes been drawn against it from Our Lord's apparent testimony to the authorship of certain Old Testament passages, e.g. his attribution to

Moses of the record of the institution of marriage at the creation, of the permission of divorce in the Pentateuch, or of the episode of the Burning Bush, or his argument with regard to the Davidic sonship of the Messiah, drawn from Psalm 110. How, it is said, can we doubt the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, or at least of these passages, or the Davidic authorship of Psalm 110, when we have such testimony as this?

The answer to this question has been so repeatedly given that we should not here reiterate it were it not that the question seems still to produce difficulty in the minds of some who are either untrained in the principles of Biblical scholarship or are completely encrusted with fundamentalist prejudice. 'The law of Moses' was the Jewish term for the Pentateuch, though Jewish scholars themselves admitted that some passages at least were not from the pen of Moses. Moses was the primal legislator of Israel, and therefore all laws were regarded as his, either directly or derivatively. The argument which Our Lord puts forward in no way depends on the question of authorship. The nature of marriage rested on the purpose of God, not on the Mosaic authorship of the Creation-story. The permission of divorce was part of the sacred law; whether Moses enacted it or not made no difference to this. The story of the Burning Bush was a story about Moses; it did not matter who wrote it.

The quotation from Psalm 110 can be similarly dealt with. To the Jews the Psalms were the 'Psalms of David', because David was the prototype of Psalmists as Solomon was of wise men. The Jews would therefore accept an ascription in the Psalms of honour to the Messiah as proceeding from 'David', and Our Lord was interrogating them on the ground of assumptions which they made. He in no way thereby committed Himself to sharing their assumption. Whatever His purpose, it was not to introduce a higher critical discussion as to the authorship of the Psalm in question.

Whether He as man knew or did not know the truth about !

such matters, is a problem that is connected with the more general problem of the limitations of His knowledge in His incarnate condition. This was fully treated by Bishop Gore in his famous essay in *Lux Mundi*. It is only necessary to refer to that, the general position of which in regard to this particular question has long been accepted by intelligent Christians. Our Lord's infallibility as a spiritual guide does not necessarily lead to the inference that He was infallible in matters of mere mundane knowledge.

Finally, it may be added that the claims of honesty and truth in matters of scholarship must not be disregarded in the interests of a particular theory as to the exact mode of the Incarnation. If it is true that the Pentateuch is not Mosaic, and that Psalm 110 is not Davidic, then no service to true religion can possibly be done by resorting to shifts in order to deny it. No truth that really matters can possibly be impaired by any other truth; for all truth is of God.

II

THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

IN the realm of Old Testament study we have seen that criticism has gained at least two assured results: Firstly, that the Pentateuch is a composite body of literature. The analysis of the documents comprising it into J, E, H, D, and P is a massively cogent result, which no Old Testament scholar can go back upon. There may be room for endless variety of opinion on secondary details; but it can be no longer denied by any responsible scholar that the Pentateuch as it stands cannot be Mosaic, that it is a compilation of laws and regulations of widely different dates, representing a progress from primitive simplicity to elaborate ritual and advanced ethics and religion, and that much of it is plainly influenced, in its present form, by the spiritual ideals of eighth-century prophecy.

The second great result of critical study is the general principle by which the prophetic and other literature of the Old Testament has been analysed; e.g. that the books of the pre-exilic prophets are collections of separate oracles, the attribution of which to their supposed authors can only be judged by their congruity with the existing data; that the books of the Wisdom-literature, such as especially the Book of Job, belong to a definite period after the exile in which such speculations were in vogue; that the Psalter is a conglomerate of liturgical hymnology; and that the apocalyptic sections of the Old Testament must be dated to the time when, with the feeling that prophecy

was at an end, apocalyptic vision took its place in the bad times of the Syrian tyranny over the Jews. There is, of course, a great deal of uncertainty in regard to many details: e.g. there are sections in the prophets which cannot be exactly dated or convincingly interpreted and, though the Book of Daniel is Maccabean, it may incorporate stories of an older tradition. But the general principle of analysis is settled, and the victory of criticism in regard to this is final.

It would be possible to reckon similar successes of criticism in relation to the books of the New Testament: e.g. the establishment of the corpus of Pauline literature, whereby Hebrews has been excluded, the Pastoral Epistles have been declared to be post-Pauline though containing Pauline sections, and the other epistles (with some doubts as to Ephesians) have been vindicated as by S. Paul; or the conclusion that the Book of the Revelation is not by the author of the Fourth Gospel, and that the Book of Acts is by the same writer as the Third Gospel, probably S. Luke. But we are here specially concerned with the signal triumph of the critical method in the analysis of the sources of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and of their relations to one another.

The Synoptic Problem

It would be a task as endless as unnecessary to give a list of the great scholars who—both in England and on the Continent, especially in Germany—have made contributions, whether of primary or of subsidiary importance, to the solution of the Synoptic problem. It is enough to say that there can be no important aspect of the interrelation

of the language and thought of these three Gospels which has not been exhaustively considered, reconsidered, and estimated in regard to other aspects; and that as a result of all this co-operative study, certain conclusions have been reached which may, so far as such language can ever be used in a matter of this sort, be regarded as universally or generally accepted by scholars. These conclusions admit therefore of being briefly stated:

There is a large amount of evangelic record which is found in all three Gospels; told in different words and not always in the same order, yet the narratives deal with the same incidents or preserve the same teaching. Careful examination of the phenomena of these resemblances has convinced scholars that the material as found in Matthew and Luke is drawn from Mark; that Mark therefore was a written source which both the other evangelists had before them. This, then, is the earliest of the three Gospels; and while we cannot be sure that nobody had previously attempted to write a connected story of the life and teaching of Jesus, and while there are sections of Mark in which it looks as if a piece of narrative had already assumed fixed form (perhaps even written form) before he used it, yet the impression given by the Gospel in general is that, so far as its material is concerned, it was the first essay in consecutive narrative.

There is also in Matthew and Luke a large amount of material which is not in Mark, but where the similarities between the First and Third Gospels are of such a character that once again scholars are convinced that they must be drawn from a common written source. There is no existing document which could have been such a

source, and therefore scholars have been driven to suppose that such a document (or documents) containing this material formerly existed and was used by the two evangelists. This document they call Q (from the German *Quelle* source),¹ and believe that it must have been a Palestinian production or from Syrian Antioch, written as early as or even earlier than Mark, since it seems possible that S. Mark was acquainted with the source in some form or other, oral or written. The exact limits of the record in this document are impossible to define, since we cannot be sure if it contained material which was not used by either of the two evangelists, or if it overlapped Mark to such an extent that the two evangelists may have been indebted to it for material which is also in Mark. But that some such document is the main source for the non-Markan matter which is common to Matthew and Luke is a conclusion to which the great majority of synoptic scholars can see no alternative.

Beyond that which is accounted for as derived from either Mark or Q, we find in Matthew or in Luke material which the one or the other singly records, and which can only be accounted for as reaching them from either oral or written tradition. The source of this special matter in Matthew cannot be further specified. For Luke, it is supposed that he had access to private information, upon which he has largely drawn for the material, which this Gospel alone preserves.²

¹ But for another explanation of the symbol, cf. Lightfoot's Bampton Lectures, p. 27.

² Dr. Streeter suggests that S. Luke began with a knowledge of Q and the possession of this private information, that from this he wrote a first draft of an incomplete account, which he later completed by

That this analysis is completely hypothetical is obvious. Nothing else but hypothesis is possible under the circumstances, since we have no direct information as to the sources used in the compilation of their Gospels by the evangelists. It is plain also that some parts of the theory are more uncertain than others, and that there is room for much difference of opinion as to the possibilities of revision or redaction by the evangelists or by others, and as to the exact reference of this or that incident to one or the other of the main sources. But the general consensus of New Testament scholars is to the effect that this hypothesis, in its main essentials, best accounts for the characteristics of similarity and difference which are found in our existing Gospels.¹

The Fourth Gospel

That John's Gospel is the latest of the four has never been denied. But in regard to many other points of primary importance in the criticism of this Gospel, scholarship is still marking time. Thus, as to its authorship, the only point upon which most scholars agree is that, as we have it, it cannot have been written by S. John the son of Zebedee. Fifty years ago it used to be often treated as a spiritual fiction of the early second century, which had no claim to be regarded as possessing historical authority. But the tendency has of late been to gravitate back from

the addition of material from Mark, after he had come to know the Second Gospel. This theory has been accepted by some other scholars; but I fancy that the general trend is against it.

¹ Excellent statements of these views may be found in Redlich, *The Student's Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels*, or Rattey, *The Gospels*.

this sceptical position and to bring the Gospel into closer relation with the Synoptic tradition and with history.

The combination of history and interpretation in the Gospel is inextricable; it is usually very difficult to say where, e.g. Our Lord's words end or are intended to end and meditation on them begins. But it is becoming more and more clear that to treat the book as pure fiction is no solution whatever; for the author shows a real interest in the actual events of Our Lord's life on earth, and in certain matters his testimony is coming to be much more highly respected as supplementing or correcting that of the Synoptists. Thus there is much ground for believing that he is correct in dating the Crucifixion as taking place on the day of the killing of the Passover and not, as Mark seems to say, on the day after the Passover meal. Again, his record of several visits of Our Lord to Jerusalem is now regarded as more likely to be true than Mark's, which only speaks of one such visit, the last. Indeed, it has been suggested that some of the events which Mark records as taking place on this last visit may well have taken place on previous visits and have all been put by S. Mark into the time of the one visit which he explicitly records. Moreover, the character of Our Lord's discourses in the Fourth Gospel is clearly different from their character in the Synoptic records. But while no wise critic would commit himself to the view that one can treat the discourses in this Gospel as the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, many would be prepared to maintain that in their context the discourses may quite well be enlargements, or meditations on actual words of Our Lord, and that in the character and method of them the evangelist may have preserved

qualities which marked the teaching given within the inner circle of disciples, and differentiated it from the teaching given to the outside crowd. On the other hand, it is generally agreed that the disputes in the Fourth Gospel between Our Lord and the Jewish leaders reflect the conditions of the later controversies between the Church and Judaism. Finally, even with regard to the placing of a cleansing of the Temple at the outset of the public Ministry, and the raising of Lazarus, it is felt that a great deal of cogent argument can be adduced to justify hesitation before one regards as fictitious the record of the Gospel as to these events.

Minor points which affect the process of criticism are (a) the apparent presence of textual dislocations in the Gospel, perhaps owing to the fact that it never reached its final revision by the author: (b) uncertainty whether the Gospel is all by one author; it is perhaps the more usual opinion that it and the first Johannine Epistle are both from the same hand; the Book of Revelation, however, is generally supposed to be by somebody else.

In sum then, it is probably wise to agree with Howard, in his valuable book on *The Fourth Gospel in History and Interpretation* (1931), that whilst the Gospel cannot be treated as a primary historical authority in general, secondarily and in details it appears to be based on authoritative information from an eye-witness; whereby it sometimes corrects and sometimes supplements the Synoptic story; but that its purpose of spiritual interpretation is always dominant. The basis of its information may be the record of somebody who, living at Jerusalem (perhaps a young man of a Jewish priestly family), was eyewitness

enough to have heard Our Lord in His moments of intimate fellowship, who had lived with Him and entered into His ways of thought. The writer of the Gospel regarded this witness as one on whose authority reliance could confidently be placed. The story is thus told to us at one remove from the eyewitness, yet it is so told that we can be sure that the writer was of spiritual kindred with him. As Dr. Rufus Jones says, 'Everywhere in these writings we are impressed with the interior depth of the author. We feel sure that, either inwardly or outwardly, he has lain on Christ's bosom, and that his personal testimony "of His fullness have we received", is profoundly true.'¹

¹ *E.R.E.*, art. 'Mysticism' (ix. 90).

III

THE LIBERAL PROTESTANT SCHOOL

SO far we have only considered the work of criticism in its analysis of the sources of the Gospels. We have now to examine the reconstruction of the evangelic story which critics have attempted to make on the basis of this analysis. We are concerned therefore no longer with the question of authenticity, but with that of authority. To what extent are the Synoptic Gospels to be accepted as veracious accounts of the events which they relate? What can be confidently received as a true narrative of what Jesus of Nazareth said and did? Can we mark off certain elements in the history of His life and teaching as due to secondary causes, e.g. to the mistakes or additions of copyists (though this is mainly a question for the textual critic), to misunderstanding by the narrators of what happened or was said, to the pictorial tendency of all narration, to the desire of the Church to give authority in the Gospel record to the doctrines about its Master at which it had arrived or was arriving?

Prejudice and Criticism

It must at once be plain how liable a scholar may be, in trying to answer such questions, to the influence of subjective prejudice. A man who starts as a convinced Rationalist (in the narrow sense of that term) is not likely to bring scholarly impartiality to bear on a history in which the belief in the supernatural plays so fundamental a part as it does in the Gospel records. It may of course

be retorted that a Christian believer may be charged with the opposite kind of prejudice; and that in fact is undeniably true. It may be the case that in a matter which is so directly connected with one's fundamental philosophy of life, entire impartiality is unattainable, and that nobody can study the problems of the Gospels from a wholly detached point of view. But at least let us be clear as to two points:

Firstly, that the prejudice in favour of Rationalism is in no way more respectable than the prejudice in favour of the supernatural. The philosophy which believes in the existence of a supernatural world impinging upon and informing the natural has just as good credentials as the philosophy of materialistic scepticism or of mere humanism; and the assumption, which rationalistic critics so often make, that they may lay exclusive claim to a purely scholarly impartiality is one which they have no right to make or to expect others to accept.

Secondly, let us also give full weight to the fact that not only is the New Testament full of the belief in the supernatural, but that the whole history of the Christian religion and of the Christian Church has proceeded on the basis of this belief. To build up a supernaturalistic story on the basis of a New Testament from which, so far as possible, the supernaturalistic element has been eliminated, is a feat of critical legerdemain which is foredoomed to failure. The supernaturalistic explanation does at any rate account for the facts, the rationalistic explanation does not.

Rationalism, to put the matter plainly, is under an inevitable handicap in dealing with Synoptic criticism,

as much as a tone-deaf man would be handicapped in endeavouring to appraise the qualities of a Beethoven Symphony or a Bach Mass. The latter might analyse its construction, but he could not enter into its meaning. The Rationalist may trace the sources in the Gospel narratives, but he starts with a serious disability in attempting to reconstruct a picture of what actually happened; for the possibility that God actually interposed in human history is one for which he has a 'blind spot' in his mental composition.

It is not necessary to give the whole story of the critical treatment of the New Testament. For our purpose we need go no farther back than the school of liberal Protestantism, which was dominant in the field of Biblical scholarship fifty years ago, and in which perhaps the greatest and most representative name is that of Harnack.¹ This school was unquestionably influenced by the speculations of David Strauss and Ernest Renan; the *Life of Jesus* by the former was published in 1835, that by the latter in 1865. The former attempted to prove that the narrative in the Gospels was simply a series of myths, the latter reduced it to a beautiful fiction. Both writers were violently opposed to any supernatural interpretation of life, and reacted with especial force against every form of ecclesiastical dogma. They were convinced and remorseless Rationalists.

The fashionable philosophy of the day was that of a materialistic Monism for which nothing was credible save

¹ Harnack's studies were primarily in Church history. But his lectures in 1899 on *What is Christianity*, in which the authorship of the Gospels is discussed, made him the spokesman of this school.

a view which treated Nature as a closed system of material causes and effects. Ernest Haeckel (1833-1919) was the best-known name among the propagators of this view, which was very influential in the time of the Darwinian discoveries when the new superstition of scientific infallibility was misleading the world into the belief that everything which happened could be explained in terms of physical science.

In theology the dominant influence in Germany was that of Ritschlianism, of which Pragmatism is the secularized version. It pressed the distinction between Fact and Value, and tended to the view that Religion was entirely an affair of assenting to certain ideas as valuable, as ideas which 'worked', and was little concerned with questions of fact and metaphysical reality. This standpoint has had some influence in both Protestant and Catholic circles. But it is certain that Protestant theology in Germany found it especially congenial. It is in principle anti-rational, and Harnack, for instance, distrusted metaphysics. But in effect it allowed theologians to surrender to the rationalist scepticism as to facts, whilst preserving such elements as they desired to preserve, as being 'valuable' for human aspiration. Thus Ritschlianism did not find it hard to make terms with Rationalism; and Rationalists have made gleeful use, or misuse, of the critical views of this school.

Rationalism, Materialism, and Ritschlianism provided the strongest, or at least the coarsest, ingredients in the mental atmosphere in which the Liberal Protestant school of Synoptic criticism attained its maturity. That in the realms of pure scholarship this school did immensely

valuable work has already been stated. The severe scrutiny to which it subjected the Gospels, in order to analyse their sources and their relation to one another, was an effort of concentrated scholarship such as has been surpassed in no other field of human study; and many of its results stand fast as permanently valuable. Of course, even in respect to this part of their work, the cloven hoof of prejudice could not entirely fail to show itself. But so far as pure scholarship is concerned, it is worth noting that Harnack at any rate set an example of candour and readiness to modify his previous conclusions when he became persuaded on grounds of scholarship that such a course was right. A thrill went through the world of scholarship when he published his latest works on the Lukan writings, in which he professed himself ready to believe that the Acts was a book from the third quarter of the first century and may even have been written before S. Paul's execution.

The Liberal Protestant Reconstruction

But in the work of reconstructing the Gospel story and appraising the authority of its various elements, this school's work has been adjudged far less satisfactory. The Gospel records, as they stand, picture a prophet of Nazareth who had become the divine Lord of Christian Faith; and this process of Christological development is to be seen not only in the Fourth Gospel, but also in S. Paul, whose writings are the earliest evidences of the Christian Society's views; and not only in S. Paul, but also embedded in the Synoptic Gospels themselves, these views, at any rate in germ and implication, are to be discovered. What then was to be made of this fact? What

had Jesus been and claimed to be? What was primary and what was secondary in the record? Had He been such as the Synoptists obviously thought Him, or was this interpretation of Him the work of Church dogmatization infecting the record? This was the question which the scholars of this school set themselves to answer.

Given their general presuppositions and the mental air of the time, only one answer was open to them. They could understand a man who was a moral teacher, the preacher of an idealistic ethic, a social or political revolutionary; such ideas 'worked'; and there was, in the evangelic record, much which appeared consistent with such a view of Jesus, whether He was pictured as the greatest of all Socialists, as the champion of the dispossessed, or as a social Anarchist. On the other hand, the Christology was the linch-pin of an ecclesiastical doctrinal system, the sacramentalism was mystical and involved an acceptance of the reality of the supernatural, and the eschatological strand in Jesus' teaching (e.g. His preaching of a coming Kingdom, of a catastrophic revolution in human affairs, of a divine interposition to settle the spiritual issues of human history) was, according to their ideas, *outré*, unpractical, couched in an obsolete form of thought and speech, crass and enigmatical. Hence they drew their inferences. The eschatology must be due in the main either to misunderstanding of ordinary statements or to the heated expectations of the Church in the strained times of early persecution. The Christology was the product of a naïve application partly of Jewish prophecy and partly of Pagan mythology; and immense ingenuity was displayed in correlating the story of the Virgin Birth, the

doctrine of the divine Saviour-Lord, the account of the Ascension into heaven, with the myths of paganism. The Sacramentalism was the result of the genius of S. Paul importing the ideas and practices of Hellenistic religion into the simple ethical ideal of the imitation of Jesus which had been the primary *motif* of Christian devotion.

Jesus then had been the leader of a purely ethical movement in religion. His movement had been shipwrecked by His Crucifixion. But by an effort of dogged refusal to abandon His programme and of pious invention, the Church had produced a myth of His Resurrection from the dead—based, perhaps, on some strong hallucinations of vision—and of His imminent Return as Messiah to consummate His work. Thus his followers had conferred upon Him a divine status; and the work of a Hellenistically-minded S. Paul accounted for the rest. S. Paul turned a Christian ethical society into a Christian Church holding a Christian religion. The simple Galilean message of moral idealism was covered by a massive framework of dogmatic interpretation which provided an elaborate system of salvation through Christ, with rites and ordinances and a Creed.

So set out, it was clear that this school offered as the primary and authoritative evangel that which Dr. Sanday rightly called a 'reduced Christianity', by comparison with the Christian Faith; it was clear too that it drove a deep chasm of division between Jesus on the one hand, and S. Paul, the Church, and the Nicene Creed on the other. Jesus had been a mere human ethical teacher, whom S. Paul and the Church had elevated into a divine Saviour, the Son of God. Several of the writers of this school gave

sincere testimony of their appreciation of the personal beauty of Our Lord's character and of the noble idealism of His moral teaching. Some, it is true, tried to maintain the view that He was a purely mythical figure, and that the story of His life was as mythological as the stories of mythical Saviours of heathen religions. But this section was never regarded as more than an eccentric by-product of ultra-critical tendencies. The impression made by the Gospels was too vital to allow such an extravagance of scepticism to become current in the circles of responsible scholarship. But if this excess was avoided, the fact could not be denied that, according to the reconstruction of this school, Jesus had been but a leading member of a comparatively commonplace category, the category of the moral idealist. He was but 'as one of the prophets'. Everything in Him which was mysterious and other-worldly was eliminated or reduced. The Christian interpretation of Him was palpably untenable. Unitarianism was the furthest possibility of rational faith. Christianity was reduced to nothing more than an ethical imitation of Christ; and this Christ was but, at best, a man who had given a superlatively beautiful example of life and preached a superlatively noble ethical ideal. That He should in any sense be the object of 'worship', that He should be regarded as effecting an atonement between man and God, that He should be able to give His Body and Blood to man to live by, was but a supreme instance of the way in which men insist on deifying the objects of their admiration. Men made Jesus Christ divine because they so much wanted to believe that God was like Jesus Christ.

The Decline of Liberal Protestant Criticism

This was the general standpoint of German criticism of this school; and though Sanday and other British scholars often uttered protests against its tendency, yet British criticism was strongly influenced by it; and in regard to the interpretation of the miraculous element in the Gospel story, even Sanday, at the end of his life, seemed to have gone over wholly to the anti-supernatural camp. This general conception has made its way by now into the coteries of conventional scepticism and may still be found reigning in the productions of the Rationalist Press Association and the columns of the *Freethinker*. But in the sphere of free scholarship it has long ago begun to fade out, as the result of examination and the continual investigation of the phenomena of the Gospels. Liberal Protestantism is now confined to a handful of conservative Modernists.

In the first place, the dealings of this school with the eschatological elements in the record were never felt to be adequate. The eschatology is embedded in the very earliest parts of the Gospel;¹ and the tendency in the Apostolic Church seems to have been rather to mitigate than to enhance its potency. Granted that Millenarian Adventism continued to be a feature of Christian expectation for several generations, yet it is plain in the epistles

¹ Streeter argues that this element is less strong in Q than in Mark, and that it is enhanced in Matthew, though it declines in Luke. The paradox, then, is one of an eschatological Mark-Matthew tradition against a humanistic Q-Luke tradition. This may well be true; but the eschatological element is certainly not absent in Q, and it is very strong in Mark.

of S. Paul, in S. Luke's writings, and above all in the Fourth Gospel, that even within New Testament times the leading teachers of the Church had felt the necessity of damping down the fervour of such anticipations. The eschatological strain in the Gospels was therefore part of the primitive equipment of Church thought rather than the product of a later age.

In the second place it came to be felt more and more strongly that the very earliest Church had a dogmatic and not merely an ethical conception of its Founder. The supposition of an original merely ethical message was found to be an illusion which rendered the transition to even the earliest Church simply inexplicable. It was frankly incredible that the personal disciples of Jesus should have started the Church upon a course of thought and belief which was an entire misconception of their Master. However simple may have been the first Christology of the Church, it was a doctrine which gave to Him a position of religious uniqueness. He was the object of religious devotion and religious reference from the first. The chasm between a merely moral teacher and a divine Person was a chasm which had never in fact existed,¹ and the making of this chasm was an error of critics and not a reconstruction of events.

In the third place, the accusation that this school gave us only a 'reduced Christianity' because it gave us only a reduced Christ was felt to be fatal to its theory. The seriousness of this objection was of course most felt by those scholars who were also orthodox believers. But even apart from such intelligible prejudice, the tendency

¹ See Hoskyns and Davey, *op. cit.*

of scholarship was, on grounds of scholarship alone, to judge that in making Jesus only one of a commonplace class, criticism had condemned itself; that neither the Gospels, nor the story of the Church, were intelligible at all, if He was no more than that, however great a specimen of the type He might be allowed to be.

The break-down of this reconstruction was, strangely enough, begun by Harnack himself. Attention has already been drawn to the candour with which he executed a *volte-face* on the subject of the date and quality of the Acts. But if Acts was early and was good history, the argument was bound to go on to consider in a new light the Third Gospel, which was so unquestionably from the hand of the same author. This had to be earlier than Acts; and a writer who showed the quality of a good historian in one book was likely to have the same quality in his other. Thus the credibility of Luke was enhanced, and the ascription of a dogmatic view of Christ to an earlier epoch became necessary.

The intrusion of historians and archaeologists like Ramsay into the sphere of Biblical criticism inevitably forced into consideration the fact that these documents were not just specimens of literature, to be dissected coldly by the scalpel of the specialist critic. They were the title-deeds of a live movement of live men; and no treatment of them could be considered adequate which did not take this fact about them into consideration. The emphasis tended to shift from the inquiry into the documents as such to an inquiry into the Church which produced the documents, and to the spiritual processes at work in the Church at the time. It was an enormous relief

to be called from the mere anatomy of a dead body of literature to the vivisection of a live society, in relation to whose life the documents were alone to be understood.

The advent of new knowledge about the pagan mystery-religions had been at first taken up widely by sceptical critics as providing a ready explanation of S. Paul's sacramentalism; and of course there were clear and obvious analogies between the two. But here in England Dr. Edwyn Bevan and others were insistent in drawing attention to the fact that the points of difference between them were as plain as and in many respects more striking and radical than the points of similarity. The power of S. Paul's Jewish inheritance came more and more to be recognized. The picture of an almost entirely Hellenistic S. Paul was found to be fictitious; and the general conclusion was reached that, whilst S. Paul's debt to Hellenism could not be ignored, it only extended to superficial characteristics; that the heart of the man was Jewish, and that the groundwork of his Christian position could only be discovered by supposing the impact of a tremendous spiritual experience of Jesus, and the influence of a strong Church tradition, upon a foundation of Jewish belief. The relation between S. Paul and Jesus came to be seen as more and more close and vital. In regard to details of the Incarnate life he might exhibit limited knowledge or interest; but he was the best commentator on and the best interpreter of the moral teaching of Jesus; however he had derived it, he possessed 'the mind of Christ' in amazingly high degree; and the bridge between the Master and His apostle became one which no scholarship could treat as non-existent or as of minor importance.

Finally, the breaking up of the philosophy of materialistic Monism left the way free for a scholarship which was less crassly anti-supernaturalistic. After the heyday of its triumphs in the Darwinian and post-Darwinian epoch, Science, driven on by its own inner urge to investigate and explain, was coming to find the universe something which could not be read as a merely materialistic system. Whilst science could not commit itself to acceptance of the possibility of the New Testament miracles, it was being forced every day to admit the presence of incalculable forces and tendencies in the processes of life, which at any rate made it impossible any longer to deny outright that those miracles might be credible. The postulate of teleology (of a purpose working in things) once more raised its head as a perfectly respectable hypothesis for a scientific man to hold; and the reality of the supernatural is something which nowadays the vast majority of leading scientists would refuse to reject as inadmissible.

The Liberal Protestant school, therefore, deserted by its own spokesman, wounded in the house of its friends by the further investigations of scholars, and with the barometer of scientific tendency no longer set fair for scepticism was in a parlous plight. The way was clear for the *coup de grâce* to be administered. We shall now see how once more the occasion brought the man.¹

¹ Harnack's own later writings appeared in 1905-8, and are therefore contemporaneous with Schweitzer's great book which appeared in Germany in 1906.

IV

THE ESCHATOLOGISTS

IT was in 1910 that there appeared in English a translation of Albert Schweitzer's book *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*. The English translation was entitled *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*; and it is no exaggeration to say that the sensation which it created in the circles of New Testament scholars was analogous to that created in scientific circles by the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. It was hailed as opening an entirely new point of view in New Testament study, and as signaling a revolution in its main outlook on its problems. So great and so cautious a scholar as Dr. Sanday gave the book emphatic and enthusiastic commendation; and English scholars were not slow to follow his lead. Schweitzer was not ploughing an entirely virgin field. Loisy's *L'Évangile et L'Église* had preceded him. He himself acknowledges his debt to other precursors. But his book at once became the *magnum opus* which all serious scholars must read and must take account of. It is still a book which has a peculiar fascination, from its lucid presentation, from its wealth of learning, from its strong grip upon certain main principles, and from the real reverence which marks its every sentence and reaches a climax in its great last chapter.

Schweitzer

Schweitzer is an out-and-out eschatologist. To him the eschatological interest in the Gospels is so uniquely primary that by comparison nothing else counts. There

never was a more single-minded player of one rich string. He finds the eschatological anticipation dominant in the early Church, in S. Paul, and in the Gospels; and his hypothesis is that it was equally dominant in Our Lord's mind. This is the one key which opens all locks. Essentially Jesus was neither a social revolutionary nor a moral teacher, but the herald of a divine event. His whole soul was concentrated on proclaiming the immediate coming of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. The ethical teaching ascribed to Him in the Gospels was either due to the Church, which found itself forced to a task of moral legislation, as the promised and expected End delayed to come, or else, so far as Our Lord gave any moral teaching at all, He meant it merely as an *Interims-ethik* for the brief period before the End was to take place. This is why it is so idealistic and, humanly speaking, so impracticable. Neither Jesus nor the Church ever intended it to be a code of moral principles for the use of generations to come.

The coming Kingdom of God was therefore the keynote of all that Jesus had to say. His ministry was for the sole purpose of announcing its advent and telling men to be ready for it. In the early days of His ministry He seems to have thought that it would begin of itself. But later, under the stress of opposition, of the delay in its arrival, and of the sense of a great 'violence' to be wrought if it was to result, He formed the notion that He must die in order to make this result possible. He must die unrecognized and unaccepted. He seems to have foretold that after His death He would rise again and would come with His disciples to set up the Kingdom. So He went to

Jerusalem on His last journey with the deliberate purpose not of teaching but of dying in order to force the coming of the Kingdom. The Last Supper was an eschatological Sacrament to bind His disciples to Him for the approaching event. He died on the Cross, Schweitzer seems to imply, in full expectation that His death would be the signal for the inauguration of the new Era.

Here Schweitzer stops short. The Resurrection, as a recorded event, is not dealt with at all. The next chapter (which is the last of the book) passes at once from the story of the Gospel record to an estimate of the abiding Jesus. The Figure given to us by a process of rationalism, liberalism, and modern theology, he says, never existed. It is a product half-historical and half-modern. The real Jesus, with His world-rejecting message, cannot be made sympathetic or intelligible to the multitude, with its world-accepting formulas. 'The historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma.' But the real immovable historical foundation of Christianity remains, independent of any historical confirmation or justification.

'Jesus means something to our world because a mighty spiritual force streams forth from Him and flows through our time also. This fact can neither be shaken nor confirmed by any historical discovery. It is the solid foundation of Christianity. . . . It is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen within men, who is significant for our time and can help it. . . . The abiding and eternal in Jesus is absolutely independent of historical knowledge and can only be understood by contact with His spirit which is still at work in the world. In proportion as we have the Spirit of Jesus we have the true knowledge of Jesus. . . . That which is eternal in the words of Jesus is due to the very fact that they are based

on an eschatological world-view and contain the expression of a mind for which the contemporary world with its historical and social circumstances no longer had any existence. They are appropriate, therefore, to any world, for in every world they raise the man who dares to meet their challenge, and does not turn and twist them into meaninglessness, above his world and his time, making him inwardly free, so that he is fitted to be, in his own world and in his own time, a simple channel of the power of Jesus. . . . The true historical Jesus was not a teacher, not a casuist; He was an imperious ruler. It was because He was so in His inmost being that He could think of Himself as the Son of Man. . . . He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me'; and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands, and to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who He is.'

This lengthy quotation, so disproportionate to the plan of our book, has been given for two main reasons:

Firstly, because it is a fine piece of religious writing, and may do something to save readers from the supposition that all critics are mere dry-as-dust scholars, who have no interests save in the cold dissection of literary documents. Nobody can resist the impression of deep and real reverence for Our Lord which such a passage exhibits. It contains many phrases which Christian Faith may gratefully accept and make its own. And that this was no mere piece of literary exaltation is proved by the example of Schweitzer's own self-sacrifice in volunteering

for work as a medical missionary in the Congo. This action, taken, as his *Autobiography* reveals, in simple obedience to the inspiration of Jesus' teaching, gives eloquent testimony of the fact that the challenge of Jesus came to him and that he obeyed its command. One becomes impatient, in face of this noble renunciation by such a man, with the petty little orthodoxasts who would denigrate him on the ground of scepticism as to the exact intonation in which he pronounces the Christian shibboleth.

But the quotation will also serve to show how much greater Schweitzer is than some of those who have followed his lead in the path of New Testament scholarship. They draw from him nothing but his scholar's reconstruction, nothing of his Jesus-discipleship. They use his book merely to set out the view that Jesus foretold the coming of God's Kingdom, that He had nothing much to say beyond that, and that He died on the Cross with His expectation unrealized. Thus they take the great Enigma that Schweitzer had—so truly—seen Our Lord to be, and make of Him nothing but a vain Dreamer or a fantastic Visionary—'as one of the apocalyptists'. But this very circumstance that Schweitzer's theory can be so easily turned into something so palpably inadequate to the fact of Jesus, makes it clear that we cannot accept it in an uncritical heat of admiration for Schweitzer's personal example. We must try to examine what he has to say not as the critical basis from which Schweitzer started for the Congo, but as the critical basis upon which the eschatological school has erected its reconstruction of the evangelic story.

Critique of the Eschatological School

The strong points of the theory are obvious. It lays a clear line of connexion between the teaching of Our Lord and the powerful Adventist expectation of the early Church. It gives full weight and significance to the eschatological phrases which so continually recur in the teaching attributed to Jesus. It reasserts strongly that which is mysterious, challenging, and other-worldly in the Gospel figure of Jesus, which the liberal theory had heavily discounted. As the herald of a divine irruption into the world, He is presented as an enigmatic personage, exercising a possibly unique position in human history. So far the theory may be said to have enormous value. It has destroyed the easy Modernism of liberal Protestantism, and Gospel criticism can never be as if Schweitzer's book had not been written.

All this we may admit and yet feel a strong doubt before accepting the reconstruction of Schweitzer as an adequate story of what Our Lord really was. We need not confuse the issue by entering into details of Schweitzer's dealing with Jesus' alleged moral imperatives and of his interpretation of various phenomena in the Gospel record. For the crucial criticisms are these:

Firstly, it is an unconvincing simplification to present the moral teaching in the Gospels as only incidental and temporary in its reference. Can we really agree that Jesus laid down no moral principles for universal application, and that the very idea of a system of Christian morals is a mistake? If ever there was a moral imperative which gave the impression of being designed *urbi et orbi*, it is

that of the Sermon on the Mount or the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Secondly, we may admit that eschatological expectations were very active in the early Church, and that they gradually died down, as the Event delayed to come; this reduction of eschatology, as has been said, is seen at work in S. Paul and in S. Luke and still more in the Fourth Gospel. But the transition, by which the Advent expectation became an ideal, seems to have been made without any mental dislocation. The Church settled down, before the Gospels were written, to a long-term programme of preparation for an event which was now coming to be placed in an indefinite future. The Synoptic Gospels proceed exactly from the period when this settling-down process was in full swing; and yet they record both eschatological and ethical teaching quite impartially and without any sense of inconsistency.¹ Can this be otherwise explained except by the supposition that both elements were present in the accepted tradition and may therefore have been present in Our Lord's authentic teaching? Certainly the 'signs of the Spirit' were soon felt to consist in moral and spiritual qualities as truly as in activities which had a more directly eschatological reference (Acts 11²⁴; 1 Cor. 12³¹); and the great argument of the Apologists of the second century rested on the moral difference which had taken place in the lives of converts.

Thirdly, we have to ask, is the Resurrection of Christ a fact or not? Schweitzer speaks great words about a Jesus

¹ Cf. a valuable study of the eschatology of the Gospels in Dodd's *Parables of the Kingdom*.

who arises in men's hearts, and who comes to men in every age to call them to follow; and his own life shows that to him this means a really practical challenge. But who gives the challenge? Is it a Figure of history, whose inspiration lies only in the power of His recorded sayings? Or is it a Present Deity, the living Son of God, whose inspiration lies in His present intercession? Does Jesus still in Person lead captivity captive and give gifts to men, or only through the abiding power of the example which He gave while He was on earth? Is He, in short, the strong Son of God, or is He only a great Idea once incarnated in an historical life? One feels that Schweitzer has never given us an explicit answer to this question; and one feels that, till he answers it explicitly, one must still be in doubt as to the adequacy of his picture in this respect. For without the guarantee given to Jesus by the fact that God raised Him from the dead, what security have we in believing that His teaching and challenge are really from God and not from man? It is imperious enough, beyond doubt; but is it the imperiousness of divine authority or of human idealism?

Finally, may it not be the case that the key which Schweitzer would apply is in its way as much too small for its purpose as the key to which the school of Harnack trusted so exclusively? The older school read Jesus as one with a programme of moral idealism. The new school reads Him as the herald of a divine event. But does He not seem to have been both of these, and more? What if His only business in His incarnate life was just to be Himself, *ὁ ὢν*, He that is, God in man, and that everything else was to be left to follow from this as God

pleased and man was docile. That Schweitzer himself may see a much bigger Jesus than his successors always see has been already allowed. But does the theory necessitate such a reading? Or does it fail to account for all the data, just because they are too rich to be included all in one treasure-house? There is paradox and tension between eschatology and humanism (between Mark and Luke) at the heart of the Gospel. The earliest Church was, it seems, both dogmatic and ethical. The earliest Christian teaching linked Christian grace and Christian morals together in an articulately composite unity; the Christians observed sacramental rites, and also sought to grow in Christlike virtue; they spoke of an imminent Advent, and also set themselves to a programme of work to cover the whole world and all time. The amazing audacity and comprehensiveness of this outlook does not look like committee-work or community-policy, not even if it be a committee of apostles and a community of the elect. The same paradox, with all its apparent contradictions, is seen in the recorded teaching of Our Lord. He speaks now of a Kingdom to come catastrophically, now of one that is growing in human society. He gives two commandments, of duty to God and of duty to men. His life revolves round two poles, God whose will He is to do and whose business He is about, and man whom He came to save and dies to redeem. The one unfailing impression which the record gives is of a rich simplicity in a manifold variety. May it be that the richness is too great and too varied to be capable of being cast up in one account-book, whether the principle of reckoning be that of eschatology or of ethics?

The Impasse of Scholarship

So, it seems, we are landed in an *impasse*. The issue has ended in a stalemate. For the time, at least, no further effort of reconstruction along either of those lines is possible, and scholarship, if it is to be still progressive, will have to embark on a new field of adventure. How it is doing so will be the subject of our next chapter. But meanwhile attention may be drawn to Professor Guignebert's huge book on *Jesus*, of which the English translation was published in 1935. It is a tremendous achievement of learning and minute scholarship. There seems to be no work bearing on the subject which the author has not read. The greater is the pity that he seems to have the temperament which makes him incapable of reading the Gospels themselves. The book is almost monumentally unsatisfying. It manages with consummate skill to combine the inadequacies of both theories into a vast corpus of inadequacy, to which credit could hardly be done except by a volume of rebuttals. It is a perfect illustration of the critical game of peeling the onion. Sheath after sheath comes off. Our Lord is deprived of the Virgin Birth, the Transfiguration, most of His supposed teaching, the Church. He did not believe Himself to be the Messiah, not even a suffering one. He taught no morals for the future. He was only a belated member of the prophetic series. His career lasted only three or four months. So the sheaths come off one by one, until we are left with a Jesus who indeed is allowed to have existed, but of whom the gigantic impossibility of the equation $\text{Jesus} = 0$ is perhaps almost as much as we can predicate.

When we study the grounds for this extreme of scholarly scepticism, we find them to consist firstly in a completely subjective bias against the supernatural as a possible explanation of everything. The author is dogmatically rationalistic in his prejudgement of every question. In the Foreword by M. Henri Berr we are asked to recognize 'the detachment of the author', who avoids 'alike a dogmatic prejudgement of the question at issue and a rationalistic bias'. Few books can ever have done less to justify such a claim.

Secondly, the book proceeds from start to finish on the remarkable assumption that Jesus could be capable of nothing which was not characteristic of his Jewish *milieu*. He is not allowed any originality whatsoever, not even as much as would be conceded to such prophets as Amos and Hosea. All in the Gospels that is not Jewish commonplace is Pauline or Hellenistic—a handily vague term which is invoked to explain everything that will not square with the preliminary assumption. We have, in fact, the old antithesis between the Nazarene Jesus and the glorified Christ which, so used by this as by former scholars, simply makes the history of Christianity unintelligible. If one thing is certain, it is that the Christian Church and the Christian religion would never have come into existence at all if Jesus had been no more than M. Guignebert will allow; since they did come into existence, it seems clear that the author has not taken account of all the data. The book has been described with entire justice as 'an admirable synopsis of a dead scholarship'.

Up to this point, then, scholarship has taken us; and

from the whole process the following constructive inferences may be confidently drawn:

(1) All theories which deny the historic fact of Jesus are exploded. Even for Guignebert's scepticism this is too much. No form of Christ-myth theory can survive the test of exegesis; and the view which makes of Him a mere cult-hero is going the way of the earlier view which saw in Him a solar myth.

(2) That the Christian tradition recorded in the Gospels is of early date is certain. The exact dates at which our four Gospels were written may never be finally settled. But the weight of evidence seems to be on the side of placing Mark before A.D. 70, though perhaps only two or three years before, Luke and Matthew between A.D. 75 and 90, and John at the close of the first century. The tradition which they incorporate must therefore go back into the early apostolic period; and Q can hardly have been written later than A.D. 60 and may be some years earlier; it may have been a Greek translation of an Aramaic book of sayings of Jesus that had been written as early as A.D. 50.

(3) It is really remarkable to notice how the Person of Christ eventually determines the argument. Critical theories try to fit Him into their several moulds of interpretation; but He always breaks the mould. We can be more sure than ever that He is a real Person, too vital to be the product of myth-making, and too big to be cabined in any one category of human interpretation; a great originative Personality, who lived and taught and endured in such a way that His followers were able to believe—and to attest the sincerity of their belief by every possible evidence—

that He had opened to them the road of salvation and was providing a living fount of divine inspiration for the life of discipleship. This conclusion is one which a sane and well-balanced criticism seems unable to evade. Whether the Christian explanation of their belief is right or not is a matter to be argued by faith and not by scholarship. But the process of scholarship leaves it open as a reasonable commentary on the facts.

V

THE NEW ADVENTURE IN CRITICISM

THE main lines along which Gospel criticism has gone during the past two generations have been summarized in our preceding chapters. It will be noticed that in spite of their salient differences in the reconstruction which they have severally offered to us, they have proceeded on the same general method and have had the same general objective. The method has consisted of an analysis of the Synoptic Gospels into their parts, of a reference of those parts to their several sources in Mark, Q, L, M; in the results so reached a very large measure of unanimity has been attained amongst the members of all schools of scholarship. The objective has then been to go behind the sources and inquire which elements in these can be considered as primary and which as secondary; what was the original message and life of Jesus? In answering this question we have observed how their presuppositions influenced the Harnack school to insist on the primariness of the ethical, while the Schweitzer school regarded the eschatological as the primary subject of Jesus' preaching. But in either case the objective was to frame a portrait of Jesus apart from the Church, a portrait abstracted from the Gospel records, after these had been dissected and assigned among their various sources.

Emphasis on the Oral Period of Tradition

Of late, however, Gospel criticism has embarked on a fresh line, and has entered on an adventure which, though to the full as speculative as that of former critics, is at

least more modest in its professions. Source-criticism is not denied, but the new criticism goes behind the written sources and seeks to trace the Church at work. It is more concerned in the formation by the Church of the Jesus-tradition than in the question of the Jesus-of-history. It raises of course the further question of the relation of the tradition to history; and we shall see that some of these critics are very sceptical on that point; they are prepared to say that the tradition was formed with very little reference to history. But this is a further point which does not necessarily arise from the pure application of the form-critical method.

Previous critics had of course allowed—whether they were conservative or sceptical—that the Gospels were not written at once, and that a time of oral tradition must have preceded the first attempt to reduce the tradition, or any parts of it, to written form. But this period had been regarded as so largely unknown that no attempt was made to particularize as to the nature of its activities in record-making. Apart from scattered and elusive indications in Acts and S. Paul's Epistles, there was no definite information¹ for scholars to go upon except the familiar quotation from Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in the earlier half of the second century, where he professes to be giving information derived from a presbyter who may have been called John, and may have been alive in A.D. 100. 'This the Elder² said: Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down carefully, though not in order, the sayings

¹ But see note at end of chapter as to the evidence of the Prologues in some manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate.

² He does not give the Elder's name.

and doings of Christ, so far as he remembered them. For Mark was neither a hearer nor a follower of the Lord, but was later a follower of Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded, but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles. So that Mark committed no error in thus writing down some things as he remembered them'; while of Matthew Papias says that 'he composed the oracles (*logia*) in the Hebrew tongue, and everybody interpreted them for himself as he was able'. On the basis of this passage not only was a theory built up that S. Mark's Gospel was practically a verbatim reproduction of the stories which S. Peter used to tell, but also a general picture was drawn of early Church-meetings, in which either eyewitnesses narrated their personal experiences or those who had heard such narratives reproduced them. This was the period of oral tradition, and the Gospels or their sources were the written form which this oral tradition assumed. It was therefore, to orthodox critics who started from this basis, a matter of first-rate importance to bring the Gospels as near as possible to apostolic authorship. S. Mark had S. Peter to rest on, S. Luke was a companion of S. Paul; but the authorship of Matthew and John was less easy to decide, and conservative scholars felt that reliance on these Gospels could not be so confidently demanded if their connexion with an apostolic eyewitness were in doubt. Hence arose their eagerness to argue that the *logia* to which Papias referred were either the Gospel of S. Matthew or at least its groundwork, and the persistence with which they refused to give up belief in the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel.

Form-criticism

The particular originality of the new type of criticism lies in suggesting that from an investigation and classification of the very stories which have been preserved for us in the Gospels, some indications can be derived as to the way in which they were preserved in the oral period. This new type is called Form-criticism (in German *Formgeschichte* = Form History), because it studies the formative period of oral tradition, and tries to discern the 'forms' in which the evangelic stories had been told in that period, and to decipher the story of the development up to the period of written Gospels. This criticism, which has been for some time active in Germany under the leadership¹ of such writers as Dibelius, Bultmann, Albertz, Bertram, and Fascher, is only now beginning to come through to England. Dibelius's book, under the title *From Tradition to Gospel*, was only published in an English translation in 1934.² There is a short account of these views in Rawlinson's *St. Mark* (1925), and discussions of them are to be found in Easton's *The Gospel before the Gospels* (1928), in Vincent Taylor's *The Forma-*

¹ The principles of *Formgeschichte* were first (so far as I know) laid down by Johannes Weiss in his article 'Literaturgeschichte des N.T.' in the encyclopaedia *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (vol. iii, 2nd edition, 1912). The present generation of Form-critics do not refer to this article, though Fascher reckons Weiss's earlier book *Das Älteste Evangelium* (1903) as a forerunner of Form-criticism. But Bultmann was a pupil of J. Weiss, and Dibelius became Professor of the New Testament at Heidelberg in 1915, thus presumably succeeding Weiss, who died in 1914. It seems probable therefore that Weiss's teaching, which the article contains, may be the *fons et origo* of Form-criticism.

² He has also published in English an admirably constructive statement entitled *Gospel Criticism and Christology*.

tion of the Gospel Tradition (1933), and in a section of Lightfoot's Bampton Lectures for 1934, published in 1935 with the title *History and Interpretation in the Gospels*. British scholarship has therefore only begun to examine this theory with any attention. But its main gist is not hard to expound:

It goes, as has been said, behind the Gospel sources to the period when tradition was forming in the Church, and its chief suggestion is that the stories of Our Lord's sayings and doings were then being told as separate anecdotes, preserved for the needs of Christian preaching, edification, apology, or moral counsel, as the working materials for a great missionary movement. The early Church, expecting the End to come soon, was unconcerned with merely historical or biographical interest. All that it cared for was the kind of story which would be of help to it in dealing with its own problems and aspirations. Both the selection of the stories and the shape which they took were influenced or determined by the necessities, hopes, and beliefs of the Church.

The classification of the stories is, broadly speaking, as follows: (1) Short narratives which end in a striking saying of Jesus which had reference to questions of faith and practice. These are called Paradigms by Dibelius, Apophthegms by Bultmann, Pronouncement-stories by Taylor (it is a confusing fact that this criticism has not yet settled down to an agreed terminology). (2) Narratives told as the setting for a miraculous act performed by Jesus. Dibelius calls these Tales, Bultmann Miracle Stories. (3) Sayings of Jesus, such as wisdom-words, prophetic and apocalyptic words, law-words and community-rules,

'I words', and parables. (4) Stories about Jesus, called Myths or Legends, i.e. narratives which explain a rite or the origin of cosmic phenomena, or describe the actions of a divine Being. Examples are the stories of the Baptism, the Transfiguration, and the Resurrection, the activity of the Baptist, the Temptation, and the Birth Stories in Matthew and Luke.

Now, so far, this theory is not disconcerting to any but a literalist faith. Nor can it be said to be in itself strikingly improbable, even if one may be inclined to feel that the classification is to too large an extent based on subjective impressions and merely speculative analysis. Professor Burkitt has a right to ask whether there is 'any evidence that early Christian missionaries were ever accustomed to enforce their announcement or defence of the new Religion by telling little anecdotes, traditional or invented, about Jesus'.¹ But in itself and essentially, the theory is only a more elaborate statement of something which scholarship has for some time generally recognized. For a strong reaction had already set in against the old-fashioned view of S. Mark as practically a verbatim reporter of S. Peter's anecdotes. Scholars were already insisting that the oral tradition of the Church underlies all the Gospels, that many or most of the narratives probably existed in disconnected fragments and were preserved because of their relation to the Church's own needs, and that in the Gospels, even in Mark, a doctrinal purpose was plain. 'Nowhere in the New Testament are events recorded or referred to simply as events. The events are set in a theological context and their record serves a theological

¹ *Journal of Theological Studies*, April 1935, p. 187.

purpose.¹ They are not biographies but portraits; and a portrait differs from a photograph in that it contains something of the artist's own faculty of appreciation and interpretation. It was clear that each evangelist was particularly possessed by interest in a specific aspect of Christ's personality. Thus in Mark Jesus is the Messiah of prophecy, in Luke He is the inspiration of a catholic universalism which cares nothing for distinctions of race or sex, in Matthew He is the giver of the new Law, while John sees Him as the Word of God made flesh and tabernacling among us. The new criticism allows full scope for this diversity of Church interest, for this selectivity of aspects in Our Lord's manifold personality.

Examination of Form-critical Theory

But the itch of scepticism and the virus of presupposition against the supernatural is still at work in leading some of these critics to deny the historical veracity of the Gospels. That the Church selected among the stories is one thing, but it is another thing to hold that the Church invented the stories. And some of our form-critics do this; thus Bultmann roundly says that 'the community creates myths'; to Bertram Jesus is a mere cult-hero with no pretence to historicity; and even Lightfoot ends his lectures by saying: 'It seems that the form of the earthly no less than of the heavenly Christ is for the most part hidden from us. For all the inestimable value of the gospels, they yield us little more than a whisper of His voice; we trace in them but the outskirts of His ways.'

At this point then we have a right and a duty to call a

¹ Hoskyns and Davey, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

halt so as to examine the theory with more particularity in order to see how far it is really satisfactory and, especially, whether it justifies or necessitates inferences so sweeping and so disconcerting to Faith. The following comments upon it may therefore be offered:

That the early tradition existed in fragmentary form is not true without qualification. Even in Mark there are signs that stories had already been grouped before they reached him (cf. 5²², where the story of the woman with the issue of blood is dovetailed into that of the healing of Jairus's daughter). The form-critics themselves admit that the Passion story must have become a consecutive narrative at a very early date, perhaps for liturgical use as a Eucharistic lection. Moreover, though the chronological scheme in Mark is very vague, and harmonies of the Gospels are quite out of date, yet even in Mark there is in the story of the Ministry a sense of movement and outline which makes it seem more than a formless agglomeration of disconnected episodes. While that Gospel cannot be considered a systematic biographical account, while its dating and placing of various stories is unquestionably indefinite, there is a real spinal column in the narrative which forbids us to believe that the tradition which it embodies was wholly disjointed when it reached the evangelist. Burkitt (*loc. cit.*) insists that Mark 'does not sound like the unconscious secretion of a community of believers. Nothing but a strong element of personal reminiscence could have produced it.'

Again, though it is probably quite true that in the early Church there was no interest in scientific biography, yet it is difficult to believe that there was no personal interest

as to Our Lord's life. Were the Christians exempt from curiosity about One whom they were called on to worship, and who, it was averred, had lived on earth only a few years ago? The form-critics classify some of the Gospel stories as 'legends', designed to satisfy pious curiosity. Can any one say that this curiosity had not begun to work even in the earliest Church? And, in trying to satisfy it, is it reasonable or even sensible to suppose that there was no conscience at work demanding that due regard should be paid to truth? It is at any rate quite clear in S. Paul's Epistles that the Church drew a definite distinction between what were 'words of the Lord' and what were not (cf. 1 Cor. 7). Moreover, is there not much in Our Lord's teaching which authenticates itself? Bultmann says that 'the community creates myths'. But does community-creation produce sayings like Jesus'? (cf. Easton, *Gospel before the Gospels*, p. 116). Finally, we must remember that the Apostolic Church was not working in a void with no actual memories to guide it. There were eyewitnesses who cannot have been ready to father or endorse *any* fiction to please piety. S. Luke certainly attached importance to the record of 'eyewitnesses and ministers of the word'; and yet, as Taylor says, 'if the form-critics are right, the disciples must have been translated to heaven immediately after the Resurrection'. For we are asked to believe that there was nobody in the earliest Church who had any such personal interest in the incidents of their Master's earthly life as would be likely to exercise some determinative influence over the formation of tradition about Him. If 'the community creates myths', there is no more incredible myth than that which has been created

by some of the form-critical community, the myth of a cult-hero called Jesus, about whom the Christians were prepared to invent anything and believe anything which suited their purpose; an empty vessel, into which the Church poured its own thoughts. After all, the teaching and person of Jesus, as given to us in the Gospels, are neither so commonplace nor so easy to follow as to seem the kind of thing which a body of imperfect men would be likely not only to imagine, but to set up as an imaginary authority for themselves to obey. If they were inventing, they would invent some standard or example which they could feel more self-assurance in aiming to reach. Men do not naturally invent for themselves the kind of Master to whom they can only say 'Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'

Furthermore, although the dogmatic purpose in the Gospels is undeniable, it seems to have affected the shape of the stories less than one might *a priori* have expected. It is significant that the miracle stories in the Gospels are definitely not used to prove Jesus' Messiahship. There are also features in the stories which play no figure in the later Church; a striking example is the title 'the Son of Man', which is so frequent in the Gospels, and then seems to vanish from Church use (Acts 7⁵⁶ is the only passage outside the Gospels in which it occurs in the New Testament). It is a familiar fact that the account of Our Lord's Baptism in Mark has often been taken to suggest an Adoptionist view of His relation to God (that He was adopted as Son by God at the Baptism), which was certainly not the current view of Pauline teaching or of the Church of Rome at the time when the Gospel was written.

The new trend of criticism is certainly interesting, and has some light to give us. Its defect is that it offers too large a field for mere subjective impressionism; it over-emphasizes internal as against external evidence; and it has to be kept strictly in order by recollecting that we cannot treat our actual data as if they did not matter. The work of classification in which these critics plunge is strongly hypothetical; and it is unscholarly to treat even suggestive guesswork as if it were convincing truth. But form-criticism has this merit, that it raises the question of the formative period, it invites us to speculate as to the conditions in the early Church under which tradition took shape, and it forces us to study the tradition in relation to the life of the primitive Church. One may doubt whether, when it has gone to its farthest limit, it will be found to have done more than supply a useful reminder of the fact that the Gospel narrative took shape as the tradition of a living and working Church.¹

But, meanwhile, we may beware of allowing it to produce yet another undue simplification. The influences moulding the tradition may well have been much more complex than the mere needs of preachers. Lightfoot's conclusion as to the vagueness of the synoptic portrait of Our Lord is far more pessimistic than the facts justify or the form-critical theory necessitates. In the long run we are forced to remember that the earliest Church was a society of men who were embracing a new and an unfashionable belief, who were ready to face many sorts of dangers and difficulties for its sake; they were not likely to do so for a

¹ Though some students seem to find in form-criticism a complete congruity with a Catholic philosophy of religion.

mere pious fiction; and they possessed among their members people who had been eyewitnesses of their Master's life. The essential feature of the Christian Gospel was that at a particular dated moment in recent history, God in person had appeared in human flesh, and had said, done, and suffered things in the eyes of the world which were treated as revealing the Nature, Will, and Character of God in a way that no previous saint or prophet had been able to do. The historic act of God was the basis of the Christian religion. It is simply incredible that the Christians, knowing what their acceptance might involve for them, should have been entirely indifferent as to the evidence that such an act had really taken place, and that the tradition of the Life and Teaching of Jesus—a life so far above human imitation, and a teaching so incalculably difficult to obey—was a tradition which was solidly grounded in the recollection of those who had companied with Him from the time of John's Baptism until the day when He was taken up.

This much, however, of solid help is given by form-criticism to those who are concerned to establish the authority of the Gospel record, that it throws farther back the date for the rise of the stories which show the reputation of Jesus of Nazareth among his contemporaries. Thus Dibelius holds that weighty elements in the tradition were fixed between A.D. 50 and 70, and since he argues (herein showing a sane restraint and sense of responsibility which not all other form-critics exhibit) that the tradition about Jesus was conservative, the formation of these traditions is moved back into the twenty years immediately following Pentecost. We should hear

no more about the Gospel story being a pious fiction of the late first or early second century. Moreover, form-criticism makes the Church's witness to the Gospel more primitive and fundamental than ever. A Christological view is implicit in the earliest stories and sayings. We had always known that the Gospels were written for the Church by members of the Church. But it had seemed important to make sure that the actual evangelists were in a position to obtain good testimony; and so the question of the actual authorship of the several Gospels had been regarded as of very great moment. But we are now asked to realize that the Gospels were in a sense also written by the Church, inasmuch as the Christian Society is the corporate sponsor of the traditions which they contain. This greatly strengthens the line of evidence by carrying it back not to this or that evangelist, but to the living voice of the Christian communities in the earliest formative period.

'The tradition contained in the Gospels may be regarded as relatively good, not because it is connected with Peter or any other Apostle, but because of its still vital connection with the mission. That tradition is evidently not yet literary, not yet intent on competition with writings and writers of the world. This unworldly character supplies the best guarantee for the originality of the tradition.'¹

It becomes therefore a matter of secondary importance who were the actual writers of the Gospels or what access they were likely to have to authoritative sources (real or written) of information, in comparison with the question whether the Gospels proceed from centres which were of

¹ Dibelius, *Gospel-criticism and Christology*, p. 83.

such importance in the life of early Christendom that the tradition which they preserved was likely to be more than purely local, was likely to have been fed by tributaries and to have been exposed to correction from many quarters. On this point the credit of our Gospels could hardly stand higher than it does. Mark is generally agreed to have proceeded from the Church of Rome and John from the Church of Ephesus. Luke is supposed to represent mainly the tradition of the Church of Antioch, and Matthew that either of the Palestinian Church or of that great area of civilization which lay in north-eastern Syria stretching to and round places like Edessa, where in early Christian days there was a rich culture and a flourishing Church. Rome, Antioch, Ephesus, Syria—one could hardly find a more important quartet of centres from which to gather the body of Christian tradition. From each comes a particular interpretation of Jesus. In regard to this interpretation each Gospel is to be treated as an organic whole. It gives an aspect of the one Jesus; and we can best make the picture of Christ, not by abstracting from the Gospels the greatest common measure of agreed portraiture that we can justify, but by putting together the four classical aspects in order to make up the one comprehensive Figure. This in fact is what Christian devotion has done.

NOTE

Some notice should be taken of a set of the Prologues to the Gospels which appears in several manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate. It seems to be the general opinion of scholars that Dom Donatien de Bruyne has made out his argument that these were written in the second century and were intended as

a polemic against the heretic Marcion. In that case, apart from the quotation from Papias, which has already been noticed, they are our earliest direct evidence as to the authorship of the Gospels. Such information as they give us which is relevant to our subject is as follows:

Matthew was written in Judea, Mark in the parts of Italy, Luke in Achaia, after Matthew and Mark had appeared. The text of the Prologue to John is corrupt, but it seems to refer to more than one person called John. In the Lukan Prologue John the Apostle is associated with the Fourth Gospel. So far, then, as these Prologues may be depended on (and we cannot be certain of their authority) they mostly confirm the suggestions made above. The 'parts of Italy' might easily include Rome as the place of Mark's origin. That Luke was written in Achaia is an interesting statement, if true (Streeter holds that both Luke and Acts were written there); we can well believe that Luke spent his latter years in Greece; but we need not therefore doubt that the tradition which he preserved was that which belonged to the Church of Antioch. The reference to John, if we read it correctly, makes the statement that there was at least a definite connexion between the Gospel and John the Apostle. We need not take too literally the definition of this connexion as 'dictation'. 'John the Elder' seems to have been a presbyter of the Church of Ephesus in the generation when John the Apostle would have been an old man.

VI

SCHOLARSHIP AND FAITH

Is Criticism Worth While?

IT was said at the outset that this book is intended for Christians who are not specialists in Biblical study. One can imagine such a person who has read this book so far saying, 'Well, what has all the bother been about? So far as I can see, the total result of it all is that we come back to the point from which we set out. Was it worth while to disturb us so much on such slight grounds? And can we feel that all this learned criticism has been anything but a beating of the air? It seems as if, at the end of it all, we can use the Gospels with the same sort of security as we felt before all this criticism began. Why trouble us to know anything about what has been such an ado about nothing?'

This comment is both true and false. It is true so far that we can use the Gospels with a security that, in regard to all major matters, is comparatively unimpaired. It is true that Biblical fundamentalism is gone; we can never again treat the Bible in the naïve way of our forefathers, as the infallible book from cover to cover, which is always to be taken in its exactly literal sense. But if criticism has destroyed this convenient but demoralizing standpoint, it has not tampered with the tradition of the Catholic Church. That in fact stands firmer than ever as the historic interpretation of the life that was lived in Palestine over 1,900 years ago. Whatever objections can be raised to that interpretation proceed not from critical

scholarship, but from the rationalist presuppositions which some critical scholars illegitimately used but which in themselves belong to a totally different field of thought and knowledge. The Church's tradition is one which Biblical scholarship cannot bar out, and that the basis of this tradition lies in the Bible is something which scholarship cannot reasonably deny.

But the comment is none the less false, for two main reasons:

Firstly, however much we may disagree with it, Rationalism has come, has had and still has its influence, and has to be met. It makes its voice to be heard at every street-corner, in every bar-parlour or club, in many a school and many a house. The simple Christian who knows nothing about the existence of such questionings must be very rarely found. Many such a one may be conscious of *malaise* on the subject. He knows that he ought to be able to give a reason for the faith that is in him, but he doubts if he can give any reason that will convince an unprejudiced listener or silence a gainsayer. He has heard it said that criticism has exposed the Bible; and he does not know enough to know how far this is true or false, or even what seeming truth it may superficially possess. His only remedy is not to express impatience with the whole business, but to set himself to learn at least as much about it as will enable him to speak with some confidence in dealing with the adversary. It is worth while for him to discover that, quite apart from any Christian presupposition of belief, the Rationalist can be met squarely on his own ground. So far as the Rationalist depends upon what he calls the 'results' of Gospel criticism, this book is

intended to help the simple Christian to meet him. It may seem to have brought us out at the door at which we went in, but there is some gain in the fact that we come out with rather more of knowledge and confidence based on knowledge than we possessed at our entry.

Secondly, it is quite idle to expect that literary and historical science will agree to consider itself estopped from applying to the Biblical literature the same sort of study as it applies to all books. From the scholar's point of view the Bible is a collection of old books with the added advantage that they are extraordinarily interesting, difficult, and important. The fact that they are the authoritative documents of the Christian religion does not make him any the less eager to study them as literature. It would be as futile as it is cowardly for us Christians to claim that they should be exempted from such examination. And if scholars are to examine them they must examine them with entire freedom as to the results which they may reach. It is for us to appraise their results when they have reached them; we must regard no scholar as infallible, and no result of his as assured, until we can feel that it has received full investigation from all quarters and yet stands firm. But the autonomy of scholarship is something which in the interests of truth is as vital as the autonomy of the soul is in the interests of personal freedom. It may have been observed that in this book we have been concerned entirely with the critical researches of British and German scholars, and that no mention has been made of the contribution of Roman Catholic scholars, such as the great school of French Dominican learning, to the exposition of the Gospels. But the reason is simple.

The work of the Dominican scholars in such exposition, such for instance as the commentaries of Père Lagrange, is of quite first-rate quality, and lays all students under a debt. But in regard to critical questions, with which we have been principally concerned, the freedom of Roman Catholic scholarship is curtailed by the decisions of the Papal Biblical Commission, which has put forward certain conclusions on these questions; and the assent of all Roman Catholics to these conclusions is required as a matter of duty. The reasons for this action by the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church are their own concern; it was part of that Church's attempt to stem the advance of Modernism, and it is not for an outsider to judge whether the action was well or ill advised. But the result of it in the field of critical scholarship is beyond question. As has been said, 'If the conclusion is prescribed, the study is precluded'. The Papal Commission has chosen to call a halt in the process of critical investigation and to impose limitations upon the freedom of scholarship. It is therefore natural that those who do not accept these limitations should feel that the dealings of Roman Catholic scholarship with this particular set of problems are not such as can be regarded as the free pursuit of the argument, wherever it may take us. The value of the Roman Catholic contribution to Synoptic study lies in other directions and along other lines than those with which we have been occupied.

Is Criticism Sound?

The next type of difficulty which may be considered is that which arises from the non-specialist's doubts as to the

critical methods themselves. Thus it is argued that criticism has often changed or modified its hypotheses, and that it may do so again. 'Why then should we pay any attention to its present set of conclusions, since in another twenty-five years they may have been given up or altered?' The answer to this is that Biblical science, like every other form of science, is continually progressing, and progress may mean alteration; but that does not excuse us from the necessity of knowing something about the present position of scientific hypotheses, or of using its present conclusions, if only as the starting-point for their supersession by something better. We do not refuse to pay respect to the present conclusions of, let us say, biological or medical science, because we know that they are profoundly different from those of thirty years ago and may have been greatly modified before another generation has passed. We need always to remember that in most sciences except mathematics all general conclusions are only provisional and hypothetical; but we can but use them at present as the best that we possess. Moreover, though scientific theories may be in time rejected or revised, there is usually a residuum which remains fast; and the work by which these theories have been reached is never wasted effort if it has been sincerely and competently done. The studies of the various schools of Gospel criticism have not been futile, even if we refuse to accept, or to accept in any but a very qualified form, their main hypotheses. For they have certainly helped students to understand better the nature of the Gospels and the history of the Church in the apostolic age than they did before these studies began.

'But', it is retorted, 'are these critical methods worth trusting? Are they not merely the application of subjective tests according to the whim or fancy or prejudice of each individual scholar or group of scholars?' To meet this question adequately is difficult without going into a multiplicity of details to show the principles on which criticism works and how it applies them. But this much may be worth saying in general: we are not considering the works of two or three irresponsible men who might all be liable to subjective considerations. Gospel-criticism has been the favourite preoccupation of a veritable host of great scholars all over the world, who have been at work on its problems with a passionate intensity. It is impossible to hold that there has been no common scientific conscience at work amongst them which would correct the tendency to mere casual subjectivism.

Moreover, in studying their writings we can see for ourselves that they have really scientific tests of all sorts to apply in reaching their conclusions, and that they work not by mere subjective guessing but by the use of recognized canons of scholarship. For example, we will cite the critical determination of the priority of Mark to Matthew. The mere outsider may be tempted to say that Mark is shorter than Matthew, and that it is more likely for a man to give a *précis* of a narrative which he is reproducing than to enlarge it. This argument has been thoroughly tested, and it has been made clear (1) that where Matthew and Mark tell the same story, Mark is often the more full and nearly always the more vivid. (2) Mark breathes the atmosphere of a more primitive Church situation than Matthew. The latter is the Gospel of a systematized

society, the former shows a far more rudimentary type of social structure. (3) By an endless set of delicate comparisons of language it can be put beyond doubt that the form of narratives in Mark is earlier than the forms of the same narratives in Matthew and Luke. By comparing the general methods of each author in dealing with his material, we can usually find the reasons for the differences in Matthew and Luke if these are derived from Mark. If the dependency is reversed, the reasons are impossible to discover. Such judgements are not the *ipse dixit* of one or two scholars, but are the result of an interminable set of co-operations, criticisms, and cross-correspondences from a whole world of scholars; their result may be confidently accepted by non-specialist students, for the work is essentially that of pure scientific scholarship.

Or let us summarize the reasons why the last section of Mark (Mk. 16⁹⁻²⁰) is universally agreed to be an addition by a later hand to the original Gospel: (1) the narrative takes a fresh start from verse 9, as if what preceded had not been there, and Mary Magdalene is mentioned as if for the first time. (2) The verses read like an epitome and not like a living record, and the incidents cited seem to presuppose the stories of the other Gospels. (3) The style and phraseology are very different from that in the rest of the Gospel. (4) The verses do not occur in the two great manuscripts Aleph and B, nor in the Sinaitic Syriac version, nor in three of the oldest manuscripts of the Armenian version. Eusebius and Jerome note their absence from the best Greek manuscripts of their time. In four Greek uncials they are preceded by a shorter ending, to which they are an alternative. In an Armenian

manuscript of A.D. 986 the verses occur with a note 'of the presbyter Ariston'; the note may be quite valueless, but it shows that doubt existed as to the authenticity of these verses. Even a non-specialist can realize that the tests applied are perfectly scientific and have no element of merely subjective fancy in them.

We have already drawn attention to the inability of all men to rid themselves entirely of all presuppositions. A fundamentalist is bound to think all higher criticism to be wicked or at least wrongheaded. A Rationalist and a Christian are bound to start respectively with a bias against or for explanations which do not reject the possibility of the supernatural. We ought all to allow for the presence of such bias, in ourselves and in others. But in the long run we may believe that Truth is bound to prevail. At any rate, if scholarship goes wrong, it can only be put right by more scholarship, not by abjuring scholarly method altogether. If we wish to refute or correct the conclusions of scholars, we shall do so only by becoming better scholars.

Criticism and the Preacher

One special difficulty arises from considering the position in which criticism may seem to place a faithful Christian with regard to his use of the recorded teaching of Our Lord as Christ's *ipsissima verba*. The Church gives us the great Christian picture of Our Lord, based on the great tradition of the Catholic Church.¹ Of this

¹ Certain elements in the Gospel records, e.g. the apocalyptic, eschatological, and demonological beliefs, may be regarded as due to the mental climate of the primitive Church. But these are incidental

tradition the Gospels are the authoritative documents, the *pièces justificatives*. And yet we find criticism suggesting that certain sayings attributed to Him cannot be regarded as His authentic words, and certain doings of His cannot be regarded as historical. For example, criticism has said that the Doom-chapter in Mark (Mk. 13) is not from, or not all from, Our Lord, or that the controversy with the Jews (e.g. in John 8) shows signs of the influence of the later dispute between the Church and the Synagogue. 'How then', it is asked, 'can we quote any words of the Gospels with confidence as His if doubt is cast upon some of them?'

This is undoubtedly a real practical difficulty, and it admits of no easy solution. Indeed, in the long run there is no solution except to say that those who speak and teach authoritatively about the Gospels must qualify themselves to do so by becoming scholars enough to know how to use good commentaries, or at least by consulting a good commentary if they are to make such a use of phrases in the Gospels as reasonable knowledge may justify. And if this seems rather a severe prescription, one may plead that the possession of sound learning and the prosecution of diligent study of the Scriptures is part of the duty of our priests, and that an immense amount of harm has been done by the ignorant use of the Bible by both clergy and laity. If criticism drives us to study the Bible more than we do, it will have atoned for all its shortcomings.

But we can add that, even apart from any critical and unessential to the picture of Our Lord as given in the Church's Creeds.

treatment, the Bible is already full enough of hard texts, which we should be well advised not to use without having first studied their meaning in a good exposition. What, for instance, might some men make of the texts about the sin against the Holy Ghost, about hating your father and mother, or the word of forgiveness to the harlot 'because she loved much', or 'the first born of all creation' as applied to Christ (a text which was used as an Arian slogan), if they had not taken some pains to learn what scholarly exposition could teach them about their significance? Criticism only gives us a new reason for caution; it does not introduce a new necessity for being students.

We may remember, too, that the great Catholic tradition of Christ is the safeguard against fads, heresies, and disproportions. It does not lie within its province to foreclose any critical questions. But the Church's interpretation of Christ's Person is something which comes to us on the continuous authority of the Church, and the literary basis of it is found in the New Testament from S. Paul's Epistles (which after all are the earliest documents in the New Testament) onwards. If we hold fast to that, such questions as are raised on points of detail by criticism need not trouble us much. The Catholic can afford to be critical, for he has in the Church's tradition about Christ that which will safeguard him from the *outré* and the irresponsible in his arguments or conclusions.

For, after all, the difficulties presented by criticism in this respect are not really of large scale. The immense bulk of the tradition may be securely used both as to the sayings and the doings. Thus, the historical evidence of the Virgin Birth may by itself be weak; we could hardly

expect it to be otherwise, though it is stronger than is always allowed; but, regarded as a part of the Church's tradition, it borrows force from the strength of that tradition; and a Christian believer will be very unready to doubt it. The evidence for the Empty Tomb is on the contrary so strong that scepticism is driven to desperate shifts in order to impugn it; and its attempts to explain it away always break down from the weight of their own improbability. It is not too much to say that but for the prejudice against miracles, very little doubt on grounds of scholarship alone would ever have been raised about it. As to the teaching in the Gospels, if it does not always reproduce Our Lord's exact words, it reproduces the gist of what He said. We may have our private opinions as to the authenticity of this or that text or passage. We may suspect here and there the presence of misunderstanding or mistaken recollection. But the scope of such reasonable doubt must be, to any believer, very small; and, as has been said, the great Catholic tradition, if he holds it firm, will save him from either magnifying his private doubts or from serious error in entertaining them.

Criticism and Truth

At this point one finds the argument from 'the thin end of the wedge' raise its head. 'If one may doubt this verse or that verse, why should one not doubt all?' This contention used to be urged against Old Testament criticism. If the six days of Genesis 1 are called in question, may one not be led on to doubt the truth of the Nativity or of the Resurrection? It now makes itself heard within the New Testament. To it there are two main answers:

Firstly, we must follow the truth, wheresoever it leads us, at all costs. In regard to these matters the question to ask is not, How far may it go, but, Is it true? It can never be right to refuse to accept a truth because it is inconvenient and makes things difficult.

Secondly, there is, we may say, almost nothing in the Gospel record which has not been doubted by some scholar or other. But we are under no obligation to accept all doubts because we may accept some. The same critical methods which called the historicity of Genesis 1 into question are those which *mutatis mutandis* have been applied in the criticism of the Gospels. But the foundations have not been cast down. Criticism has had its oscillations, but its general tendency has always been to revert towards Belief and thereby to strengthen intelligent Faith. It is an enormous reassurance to feel that we have now better reasons for believing in the authority of the Gospels than we had before criticism began its work; and the process has been one which has thrown a flood of light upon their obscurities and difficulties. The Church can still with confidence present to its faithful members the picture of Jesus Christ the Son of God, Perfect God and Perfect Man, as drawn for us in the Creed, and can still point to the Bible as its justification of such an interpretation, to the Old Testament as the book of preparation and to the New as the book of the fulfilment. In the Gospels and the other New Testament books there is all the material needed to judge whether this interpretation is congruous or not with the Life which He led on earth. Most of His teaching authenticates itself immediately as such as God in man would give. If in certain passages

this authentication may be more dubious to read, the process of criticism makes it possible for us to say that such passages are few.

The one thing which we must not do is to allow a rightful veneration for the Catholic tradition to reintroduce into the Church of England the old fundamentalist view of inspiration. For, apart from the fact that such a view cannot hold water, it offers to man an infallible guide, and a book as such a guide; and this is mischievous to faith. In regard to the Old Testament the problem is settled. Nobody can fail to discern that there are degrees of inspiration within that book. Nobody, for instance, can place Nahum on such a high spiritual level as Second Isaiah, or 1 Kings 22 on an equality with Hosea. God has ceaselessly been trying to reveal Himself to man. But He had only human channels to use, and those channels could only be in varying degrees imperfect organs. The gramophonic theory of divine inspiration is dead.

Similar considerations apply to the New Testament. The Perfect Life was lived. Men companied with the Lord, recalled His teaching, and wrote the record of it. In everything of really primary and essential importance we may believe that the indefectible grace of the Holy Spirit would preserve the Church from serious error. But the Spirit in the Church, like the Spirit in the Bible, found no infallible channels through which to work. The disciples themselves confess that they could not understand the Lord when He was with them; it is not hard to believe that they could not understand Him perfectly thereafter. There was, because they were imperfect men, room for misunderstanding and misrepresentation of their

Master. It is the work of scholars, commentators, and expositors to decipher where such traces of mistakes or imperfect understanding are to be found. In doing so they have hammered out certain canons of judgement. No doubt the subjective element has played some part in their use of these canons, but this element can receive curb, check, or justification from the work both of scholarship and of Faith. Scholarship is doing its part in this process. Faith must also do its part. It is the business of Faith to insist that true scholarship will not by presuppositions and prejudices bar itself from receiving correction. And the outcome of it all is a rational Faith, which is the only adequate *riposte* to Rationalism. For essentially Faith and Reason cannot be in opposition to one another. The Scholastics were convinced that this was so, and in a recent book on *The Pain of the World and the Providence of God* Father d'Arcy places in the mouth of a Priest the great saying 'the appeal to religion as a substitute for reasoning is to me an insult to God'. Criticism is but a special subdepartment of the process of reasoning. We may feel that it has vindicated its value, and that the contribution of Christian scholars to it has been not the least of the influences in procuring that vindication. Certainly Christian scholarship could not leave this field of work untouched; and Christian believers need have no fear of its result.

Magna est veritas et praevallebit.

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